

EXPLORING AND UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICES, BEHAVIORS, AND
IDENTITIES OF HIP-HOP BASED EDUCATORS IN URBAN PUBLIC
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Exploring and Understanding the Practices, Behaviors, and Identities of Hip-hop Based Educators in Urban Public High School English/language arts Classrooms

H. Bernard Hall

Grounded in theories of culturally relevant and hip-hop pedagogies, this ethnographic study of a demographically diverse “community nominated” cohort of urban public high school teachers who integrate hip-hop pedagogies into their English/language arts classrooms responds to the methodological and theoretical shortcomings of a burgeoning body of research known as “hip-hop based education” (HHBE). HHBE has argued that curriculum and pedagogy derived from hip-hop culture can be used to transmit disciplinary knowledge, improve student motivation, teach critical media literacy, and foster critical consciousness among urban students in traditional and non-traditional K-12 learning environments. However, the field’s overreliance on firsthand accounts of teacher-researchers, the vast majority of whom position themselves as members of the “hip-hop generation,” discounts the degrees to which teachers’ cultural identity informs hip-hop based curricular interventions, pedagogical strategies, and minority students’ academic and socio-cultural outcomes.

I argue that the hip-hop pedagogies evidenced by non-researching “hip-hop based educators” were diverse and reflected different beliefs about hip-hop, pedagogy, and the politics of education. Three primary findings emerge from 280 hours of classroom participant-observations and ethnographic interviews (January-June 2010): (1) teachers psychologically and discursively construct and perform individual hip-hop cultural identities through “necessary and impossible” (Hall, 1996) politics of difference, (2) teachers’ respective curricular approaches to hip-hop as literary texts are closely linked to

their respective hip-hop cultural identities, and (3) *hip-hop pedagogues* employed hip-hop methodologies and literacies that reoriented conceptions of self and other, the structure of teacher-student relations, and notions of knowledge around “pedagogies of hip-hop.” Study findings are salient to the fields of hip-hop studies, critical multicultural teacher education, and English/language arts Education as they provide robust portraits of the instructional and relational nuances, as well as cultural-political implications of HHBE for a largely White, middle-class prospective teacher workforce and an increasingly diverse hip-hop nation.

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The man I am and scholar-activist I aspire to be is a reflection of my first, most influential teachers. My grandmother, Elvira C. Hall (rest in peace), taught me priceless lessons on family and faith. Every time I think, hear, see, or say the words *Dr.* and *Hall* I can feel you smiling down on me. While it is safe to say that I wasn’t always receptive, my father, Harry B. Hall (he’s a little sensitive about being called *Sr.*), taught me all the things a boy needs to become a man. Above all else, he taught me the difference between right and wrong. The conviction I possess to fight for the former and against the latter comes from you. My mother, Therese H. Hall, is the one who instilled in me the passions for learning, teaching, and writing that made me believe an endeavor of this kind was possible. I know *thank you* doesn’t come close to cutting it – I hope *I love you* does! I’d also like to acknowledge my brother Nathan P. Hall, and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins for lifting my spirits when my head hangs low, and checking me when my head gets too big.

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CHAPTER ONE “HIP-HOP SAVED MY LIFE”: AN INTRODUCTION

“He said, ‘I write what I see
Write to make it right, don’t like where I be’” – Lupe Fiasco

Recently, a burgeoning body of research known as “hip-hop based education” (HHBE) has argued that curriculum and pedagogy derived from hip-hop culture can be used to transmit disciplinary knowledge, improve student motivation, teach critical media literacy, and foster critical consciousness in urban students in traditional and non-traditional K-12 educational settings¹ (Hill, 2009). To date, HHBE research is dominated by firsthand accounts of public school teachers or community-based educators turned academic researchers who position themselves as hip-hop cultural “insiders” (e.g. Emdin, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Hill, 2009; Stovall, 2006). Teacher-researchers have succeeded in bridging the gap between educational theory and practice, in this instance, revealing hip-hop pedagogies that accomplish the academic and socio-cultural objectives of critical pedagogy (Emdin, 2008; 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Stovall, 2006) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Hill, 2009). However, this singular methodological approach to HHBE, due in part to the limited scope of practitioner-inquiry, discounts the degree to which who we are *culturally* informs “the way we teach” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 13) and minority student achievement (Delpit, 1995; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Valenzuela, 2002). This dissertation study pushes the field of HHBE in new directions as I employ critical ethnographic methodologies to explore and understand the intersections of *non-*

¹ I define *traditional* learning environments as formal public or private K-12 learning institutions. Examples of *nontraditional* learning environments include but are not limited to community centers, correctional facilities, programs for “at-risk” youth, etc.

researching teachers' cultural identities, hip-hop based curricular interventions, and pedagogical effectiveness.

Grounded in theories of culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995b) and hip-hop pedagogies (Hill, 2009), the following research questions guided this investigation of a demographically diverse, "community nominated" (Foster, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995b) cohort of four non-researching "hip-hop based educators" teaching English/language arts in small urban public high schools in the "Riverfront School District" (RSD)²:

1. What are the teaching practices and behaviors of a cohort of hip-hop based educators?
2. In what ways do these practices and behaviors reflect or not reflect hip-hop pedagogies?
3. How is the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies impacted by participants' cultural identities?

Drawing on 280 hours of classroom participant-observations and ethnographic interviews (January-June 2010), I argue that the hip-hop pedagogies evidenced in the cohort were diverse and reflected different beliefs about hip-hop, pedagogy, and the politics of education. Three primary findings emerged from my study: (1) teachers psychologically and discursively construct and perform individual hip-hop cultural identities through "necessary and impossible" (Hall, 1996) politics of difference, (2) teachers' respective curricular approaches to hip-hop as literary texts were closely linked to their respective hip-hop cultural identities, and (3) *hip-hop pedagogues* employed hip-hop practices (ciphery and freestyling) and literacies (narrativizing, and signifying) to

² District, schools, administrators, and teachers' identities have been protected by the use of pseudonyms.

reorient conceptions of teaching and learning, the structure of teacher-student relations, and notions of knowledge around “pedagogies of hip-hop” (Hill, 2009).

These findings respond to the methodological and theoretical shortcomings of HHBE research by problematizing tacit assumptions regarding (a) “who is using hip-hop in the curriculum, their motivations for doing so, and their prior experiences with hip-hop” (Petchauer, 2009, p. 964), and (b) the agentive and/or reproductive potential of hip-hop cultural identities and pedagogies in regulatory state institutions such as public schools. This more expansive, penetrative portrait of the instructional and relational nuances, as well as cultural-political implications of HHBE is timely as it contributes to broader discussions of how, if at all, to prepare a largely White, middle-class teacher (and teacher-educator) workforce to become multicultural learners capable of understanding and appreciating diversity (Lowenstein, 2009).

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter concludes with a disclosure of who I am – in particular, my identity development as a Black male of the hip-hop generation in suburban Detroit and West Michigan, the classroom, as well as the academy.

In Chapter Two, “Conceptual and Theoretical Framework,” I move to what I believe – or the notions of teaching, learning, and scientific research that inform the study. This entails critically examining the literature pertaining to the practices, behaviors, and outcomes associated with culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and hip-hop pedagogy (Hill, 2009), and building a case for the continued advancement of HHBE theory and praxis.

In Chapter Three, “Research Methodology,” I detail the critical ethnographic research methodologies used in data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four, “Constructions and Performances of Hip-hop Cultural Identities,” illustrates how members of the cohort psychologically and discursively position themselves as *old school*, *new school*, *out-of-school*, and *no school hiphoppers* in formal and informal interviews.

In Chapter Five, “Droppin’ Knowledge or Depositing the Real?: Approaches to Hip-hop Based Curricular Interventions,” I draw on my classroom participant-observations to provide instructional frameworks that outline and interrogate how *old school*, *out-of-school*, and *no school hiphoppers* integrate hip-hop texts into their English/language arts curriculum.

Shifting the conversation from hip-hop as (historical, literary, and political) texts, to hip-hop as methodology, in Chapter Six I present *new school hiphopper*, Mr. Westland, as the “*Real Hip-hop Pedagogue*” archetype.

Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes the conclusions and implications of this study of HHBE for the fields of hip-hop studies, critical multicultural teacher education, and English/language arts Education.

Situating the Researcher: Who I Am, What I Believe, and Why it Matters

My research agenda is driven by who I am, what I believe, and where and when I have lived. I am a 32-year-old Black, heterosexual male, husband, father of two, teacher educator, scholar-activist and hiphopper. I was born in Detroit December of 1979; the same month and year hip-hop, specifically “Rappers Delight,” began its diaspora out of

New York City via the radio airwaves. The oldest son of a Black Michigan State Policeman and White Detroit Public Schoolteacher, I grew up in middle-class homes in Southfield and Kalamazoo, Michigan. As a “mixed” kid growing up during the 80s and 90s in suburban Detroit and West Michigan, knowing and being myself was never easy. Like many middle-class “Black” families at this time, rap music for all intents and purposes was illegal in my home. When it comes to my identity development, in particular my negotiation of what it means to be “Black,” even at the risk of sounding cliché, I do not hesitate in professing that “hip-hop saved my life” (Fiasco, 2007).

I came of age at the height of hip-hop culture’s popular and commercial commodification in the mid-to-late 1990s. As is the case for many youth from small, Midwestern towns with big city problems (e.g. deindustrialization, drug abuse, etc.) like Kalamazoo; much of what I learned about hip-hop culture and Blackness – good and bad – was mediated by MTV and BET. It was Chuck D of Public Enemy, speaking from the electric chair, who taught me that you “Can’t Truss [sic] It.” It was Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg who also taught me “Bitches ain’t shit.” My high school was divided along racial, class, and aesthetic lines that mirrored (and imitated) the “East Coast/West Coast” feud. What we bought and sold as “rap beef” between Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur, was ultimately mass media’s most profitable (and costly) exploitation of longstanding, intersecting debates about Black identity politics.

In one corner stood me and my fellow “Westsiders” (middle-class suburbanites) – faithful disciples of the Wu-Tang Clan and Bad Boy Records. In the other, wearing creased Dickies’ suits, the “real niggas,” or poor Blacks from the North and East sides of town, represented Death Row Records (Tupac, Dr. Dre, and Snoop,) and Master P’s No

Limit Records. We performed our cultural authenticity by co-opting the aesthetics of New York hip-hop. We wore New York Yankee baseball caps and emptied unsuspecting local outdoor apparel stores of their stocks of Timberland boots and Clarks Wallabees. We defined *real* rap music by how many times you had to rewind a verse to decipher its lyrical complexities, as opposed to how much the bass rattled your trunk or raised your adrenaline.

Since I was 9 years old, “borrowing” my cousin Dee’s Eric B. and Rakim tapes out of his car, I have always been drawn to how MCs “move the crowd.” Evidence of my middle-class Midwesternness, the first cipher I entered was in my best friend Elliott’s Pontiac Grand Am. The first time I battled a “real nigga” in the cafeteria was the first time in my life when the literary talents that physically and culturally “tracked” me away from Black people, in the form of Talented and Gifted programs, Advanced Placement classes, and later, predominantly White institutions like the University of Michigan, actually brought me closer to them.

The Golden Child

My arrival in Ann Arbor the fall of 1998 happened to converge with the arrivals of hip-hop and the Internet to the forefront of American culture. Together, they provided those of us too young, too far, too White (or light-skinned) and privileged enough to have Internet access with greater agency to explore artists and identities that challenged false East/West, gangster/conscious, underground/commercial dichotomies perpetuated by the mainstream music industry.

Before my first semester on campus, I did not have the privilege of seeing a Black male at the head of the class. Aside from my high school principal (a Joe Clark archetype) and middle school gym teacher, the only Black men I saw in schools were paraprofessionals, janitors or coaches. In lectures, office hours, and assistantships with English professor Ralph D. Story and African and Afro-American Studies professor Alford Young, Jr., I saw Black men living the “life of the mind,” demonstrating their Blackness and manhood, not through feats of physical prowess, but through their words and ideas. With Common, Black Star, and Dead Prez lecturing in one ear, Baldwin, DuBois, and Césaire drumming in the other, I started asking larger questions about my “miseducation” (Woodson, 1933), my politics, and my country. What is more, I began expressing the answers and frustrations that accompanied them through rhyme.

While Harry Bernard Hall, II was earning degrees in English and Sociology, Golden Child and his hip-hop band, Total Disregard, was “droppin’ science” in underground hip-hop venues in Metro Detroit and college markets across the Big Ten region. In the 1986 film the character played by Eddie Murphy was chosen to protect the Golden Child, a Buddhist mystic who possessed the power to heal the earth. I took the name in the “trickster” Black folk hero tradition (Roberts, 1989) as a metaphor for my perpetual “youth” and the deceptive socio-political objectives of my music. The highlights included opening up for Bahamadia, Mos Def, and above all others, The Wailers.

The first song on our independently released studio album, *Detach Yourself*, was “Criminology 101.” Fueled by an uninspiring professor of Criminology, the song is built

around the extended metaphor of me lecturing him on the *real* criminals and victims in our society.

Today, I, conjectured a lecture on criminal theory
Before we get started can everybody hear me clearly?
Pay attention and listen, ain't no sleepin or driftin
Cause if I catch ya slippin then ya catchin detention

This lawsuit's a class action of a political faction
'gainst Anglo-Saxons entrapin us Latins and Africans
For trafficin trade routes they spent years establishin
But when I cry conspiracy I'm disorderly fashioned?

They lock us up, take the credits, take the profits, wash it and launder it
and recycle to their pockets so they daughters can squander it.
Ronald Reagan, the epitome of crook
It took 8 years and 2 George Bush to realize we was on the took --

take. Whether bought out or sold out
there's no doubt lies come out they mouth like water out of a spout –
pipe down. I know in Motown the mayor's Brown
but he blends in with the rest of them clowns behind his vows

Hell naw! Takin me as an ignorant nigga is a faux pas
Got more knowledge on worldly topics than Tom Brokaw
The revolution you can't stop only stall
And even then it's too late, your ignorance will be your downfall.

I'm, co-dependent on my co-defendants
prohibited from co-existence in this code of ethics
That leaves us in a cold blizzard,
freezin and blistered, with no coat to shield us

Enlisted in a Coltrane-of-thought, where the have-nots,
armed with dread locks and black glocks, rob the have-lots of everything they got
From the belly of the beast, an interview with Abu Jamal disturbed me,
worried me, how the majority hasn't a clue on criminology.

Contemporarily brutality wears a badge,
and these cowards hide behind it like a mask.
This ain't no Halloween
America's dream is seldom seen certainly urban teens dream

But they rudely wakened by sounds of gun claps and sirens
Dope fiends, murderers and burglars and the proverbial

master of ceremony testimony audible at high decibels

Return to your syllabus, read next three chapters plus,
I hope you took notes, construct your own thesis, class dismissed.

Now, as I did then in 2003, I offer these lyrics as both a personal manifesto and example of the music I authored in an effort to heal my culture and myself. The “hip-hop generation” – African-Americans born between 1965 and 1984 (Kitwana, 2002) – emerges from the hope and heartache, progress and struggle experienced by urban youth in post-Civil Rights Era America (Chang, 2005). Hailing from the birthplace (and resting place) of the automotive industry, I witnessed the erosion of the economic pillar of urban America and the middle-class firsthand. In Detroit, the industrial downturn was compounded by unprecedented levels of White, and in our case, Black middle-class flight (Farley, Danzinger, Holzer, 2000). As depicted by the Academy Award-winning motion picture bearing its name, 8 Mile Road is more than the political boundary separating Wayne and Oakland Counties, Detroit and the suburbs. It is a symbolic boundary marking the racial and class divides that have become synonymous with Metro Detroit. For my parents – my dad being from Jim Crow’s Alabama and my mom who was born and raised in the enclave of Highland Park – “movin(g) on up” to our ranch-style home on the “other” side of 8 Mile Road was emblematic of their individual social mobility. For those left behind, it was a yet another example of the collective social abandonment of the city and its people in the wake of the riots of 1967. Through my grandmother’s window, my father’s horror stories at the dinner table, and the evening news, I watched as the War on Drugs and war over drugs tore families, including my own, apart.

Mr. Hall

My career as a teacher began as my “career” as an MC was coming to an end. What started as substitute teaching in between performance dates, turned into a long-term assignment at Ann Arbor Pioneer High School where I taught DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folks* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to “advanced” 11th grade American Literature classes absent of any Black or Brown faces. I used my newfound connections at Pioneer to return to the University of Michigan to pursue a Master’s and secondary teaching certificate in English and Sociology. My cohort would be the first admitted under NCLB’s “highly qualified teachers” requirements. It was through our yearlong exploration of the question: *What is effective teaching?* that I became acutely aware that we were not all there for the same reasons.

In my thesis project I recounted two incidences that continue to stay with me to this day. The first was a comment from a colleague who I occasionally carpooled with to and from Romulus High School where we did our student-teaching. He said, “They say the children are our future. I couldn’t disagree more. *My* children are *my* future. This is my job.” In other words, these were “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995), and other people’s problems. His responsibility for them and investment in them came and went with the bells that signaled the beginning and ending of his History class.

The most poignant moment came from my cooperative teacher, a White female only two years my senior. In an evaluation of my unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird* she wrote: *Teaches as if the class was African-American Literature*. Curious to know (a) what that meant, and (b) how she would approach teaching a novel about a Black man falsely accused and unjustly convicted of raping a White woman in the Jim Crow South

she said matter-of-factly, “Objectively... You allow your biases as a Black man to enter the classroom far too often.”

The single most important takeaway from my teacher education was that my beliefs about teaching and pedagogical strategies were inexorably tied to my experiences and worldview as a Black man of the hip-hop generation. As I transitioned into my own classroom, I continued to learn how my students and colleagues would perceive this identity, these beliefs, and these practices differently.

Upon graduation I was hired to teach 8th grade English in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor’s Blacker and poorer neighbor to the east. *Overstanding* the ways composing and performing creative writing aided my own intellectual and cultural-political development, I also created a spoken-word poetry class that came to be known as “Café Blue.” I exited U of M’s School of Education and entered West Middle School without ever being exposed to theories of critical and/or culturally relevant pedagogy. Whether *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, or *Tell-Tale Heart*, my teaching was foregrounded in the language and cultural codes of hip-hop, as well as our individual and collective experiences of marginalization in school and society. Using rap music to teach figurative language and problematize the academic and cultural truths operating in and around school was “just good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

After the district banned the controversial “Snowman” T-shirts (the logo and alter ego of rapper Young Jeezy) I led students in research and debates on censorship and the appropriateness of such explicit drug imagery in school. I arranged for four exceptional students to reenact the debates at the monthly school board meeting. When a student on the other 8th grade team questioned my mentor teacher on why they, too, were not talking

about Young Jeezy, the typically reserved woman in her late 50s ducked her head in my room and vented: “Are you trying to make me look bad?” Her parting shot, “One day you won’t be so young or so cool and will actually have to teach something.”

In retrospect, I am glad she left before I responded viscerally. Instead, I was left to my reflective journal to answer her charges. I did nothing intentionally to make her look bad; however, everything I did do was designed to get my students to look at themselves, their teachers, and their communities critically. Despite my students’ performance on state standardized tests and their increased participation in and identification with school curriculum she did not think what I was doing – building students’ critical consciousness of school policy and engaging students in cultural critique – was teaching at all. The anger in her eyes and resentment in her voice caused me to doubt myself for a moment, and question how much of my effectiveness as a teacher could be attributed to my age, my culture, and presence as a Black male. Moreover, for the first time, I began to ponder how the effectiveness of female teachers her age and her culture might be enhanced by professional development in the words and worlds of hip-hop.

I was in the classroom for a year and a half before the superintendent appointed me “Dean of Students.” I can now admit (and appreciate) that I was not prepared for the education I would receive in this position. I was given the title “Dean of Students” rather than “Assistant Principal” due to my coworkers’ disapproval of a non-tenured teacher receiving such a promotion. Over the holiday break I went from being a teacher who had not written a single disciplinary referral, to being chiefly responsible for enforcing the school’s Code of Conduct. I found that West Middle School and the Ypsilanti School District had “zero-tolerance” for any aspects or expressions of hip-hop culture in their

schools. I sent students home for wearing athletic jerseys backwards (“wearing clothes in a manner for which they were not manufactured”), possessing a “doo-rag” on school grounds, and of course, sagging pants. I am embarrassed to admit that doing my job included assigning students detention for freestyling, or according to the lunchroom staff, “horseplaying” in the cafeteria. In addition to my administrative duties, I took solace in that I was also responsible for creating district-wide professional development that responded to the sharp increase in disciplinary referrals administration attributed to “cultural conflict.”

Call it youthful naïveté, but I saw this promotion as an opportunity to first infiltrate and then implement institutional change. I also thought it would be empowering for my students to see a 26 year-old Black man in Timberland boots in a position of authority. I was wrong. I will never forget the looks of betrayal on my students’ faces – their poems and their parents’ tongue-lashings describing me as “just another teacher” and Uncle Tom. Nor will I forget the many “note(s) from your friends in the teacher union” that flooded my mailbox, reminding me that staff meetings could not be used for professional development. In the end, the guilt that came with criminalizing myself, and the frustrations that came with “teaching old dogs new tricks” were not worth the pay raise or migraines, and I chose to leave.

Professor Hall

I left the classroom and embarked on this dissertation study with my students, cooperative and mentor teachers, and fellow teachers of the hip-hop generation in mind. My research focuses on the practices and behaviors of effective teachers of urban

students. Specifically, I am interested in the myriad ways epistemologies, ontologies, and pedagogies of hip-hop culture can be tapped in an effort to narrow the “demographic divide” (Banks, 1995; Gay & Howard, 2000) between urban teachers and students. My anecdotal experiences teaching undergraduate educational foundations and curriculum and instruction courses in Temple University’s College of Education confirms the research on the dearth of Black male educators (Lewis, 2006). Of the more than 600 prospective educators I have encountered over the last 6 years, less than 10 have been Black males.

My scholar-activism includes serving as hip-hop curator for Art Sanctuary, a community-based non-profit organization for the Black Arts in North Philadelphia. Here, I create and facilitate state-accredited professional development workshops that “school” in-service teachers and administrators on how to “Do the Knowledge” – a hip-hop curriculum guide aligned with Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening and Arts and Humanities. The purpose of this hip-hop curriculum guide is to validate the experiences and knowledge of urban youth in more traditional academic contexts, especially the secondary school context. In keeping with this purpose, the first goal is to develop students’ ability to effectively read, write, speak, and listen. The second goal is to promote critical thinking about music, art, and culture broadly and hip-hop music, art, and culture specifically. Through my work with the School District of Philadelphia, Coatesville Area School District, Camden City Public Schools (NJ), Penn State University at Great Valley, and the National Liberty Museum my optimism has been renewed by the breadth of educators, the vast majority of whom are White and female, working in urban secondary schools, even elementary, suburban,

and/or parochial schools, interested in HHBE. At the same time, I am often reminded of the challenges the field faces in meeting the practical wants and needs of teachers while honoring the cultural and political tenets of hip-hop. My interests in learning more about why and how non-researching teachers, especially cultural “outsiders,” are infusing hip-hop into their English/language arts curriculum and pedagogy motivate this study.

It is my hope that this is not misconstrued as a “victory narrative,” but rather an airing of my “value orientations” (Carspecken, 1996) as a Black male teacher-educator of the hip-hop generation and vested interests in improving the educational and lived experiences of underserved youth, in particular Black youth. The children of Romulus, Ypsilanti, Philadelphia, and Riverfront are *my* children. They are my sons, my former classmates, my neighbors, and my students. I am personally and professionally invested in hip-hop; it is my “way of life” (Williams, 1961, p. 35), as well as my livelihood. And with every keystroke I am mindful that the privilege of speaking about and for hip-hop was bequeathed not by hip-hop, but by the academy. Important to consider, being that teacher education, among other things, is a hegemonic site of struggle among White people (Lensmire & Snaza, 2010). Starting with this ethnographic study of HHBE, I see my scholarship and teaching as a form of activism with the expressed, unapologetic purposes of “remixing” the Ivory Tower.

CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion, research design, data collection and analysis in this dissertation study are situated within the frameworks of hip-hop studies, critical multicultural teacher education and culturally relevant pedagogy. I begin this chapter by drawing on the fields of hip-hop studies and cultural studies to unpack the structural and cultural origins of hip-hop and key terms pertinent to discussion. With this foundation, I position HHBE as a strand of critical multicultural teacher education useful in narrowing the “demographic divide” (Banks, 1995; Dilworth, 1992; Gay & Howard, 2000) between urban teachers and students. From there, I critically examine the research pertaining to the teaching practices, behaviors, and outcomes related to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), explaining how they inform the notions of effective teaching and student achievement that shape the study. Using Hill’s (2009) tri-partite “pedagogies *with, about,* and *of* hip-hop,” the chapter concludes with a review of the instructional, dialogical, and political facets of “hip-hop pedagogy.”

Hip-hop Studies: Remixing Ed Schools

A *remix*, in its simplest terms, is a remodeled version of a song. In hip-hop, remixing often entails altering or overhauling the beat. Sometimes it means changing lyrics, or adding popular or up-and-coming artists to extend the life of a song. Sometimes it means doing all of the above. The field of hip-hop studies has embarked on a similar endeavor, tinkering and transforming the academy’s discourses on hip-hop culture as the object and subject of inquiry. Through historical and textual analyses (Rose, 1994; Neal & Forman, 2004; Cobb, 2007) and social commentaries (Chang, 2005; Kitwana, 2002;

Dyson, 2007) academic and street scholars have shed light on the myriad of historical, social, and aesthetic peculiarities of the most “dominant form of youth culture on earth” (Cobb, 2007, p. 4).

Born in the South Bronx during the 1970s, Rose (1994) outlines hip-hop’s structural and cultural origins in the following terms:

Situated at the ‘crossroads of lack and desire,’ hip-hop emerges from the deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect. Hip hop is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community (Rose, 1994, p. 21).

At the dawn of globalization, transnational corporations and technological innovations ushered the manufacturing sector out of inner cities to the suburbs, and eventually overseas. According to Kitwana (2002), this resulted in a stagnation of the Black middle-class, in addition to a steep incline in Black poverty rates. The industrial downturn converged with the reorganization of urban spaces (Forman, 2002) and relocation of working-class minorities to public housing (Venkatesh, 2002). This alienation was further exacerbated by public policies couched in neoliberal rhetoric of small government and individual responsibility that redistributed not only wealth (e.g. Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981), but also the political will that once propelled a progressive War on Poverty. Faced with the hope and heartache of Black leadership in the post-Civil Rights Era, drastic cuts to education and other “entitlement” programs, crack cocaine and AIDS epidemics, hip-hop’s forefathers – DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata, and Grandmaster Flash – laid the groundwork for a sound, movement, style, and worldview conveying their own *counter*-narratives of decline. This culture, expressed by the artifacts or “elements” of DJing, MCing, breakdancing, graffiti art, beatboxing, street fashion, street

language, street knowledge and street entrepreneurship (KRS-One, 2003) is what the world knows as hip-hop.

According to Shusterman (2005), “Hip-hop captures its fans not simply as music, but as a whole philosophy of life, an ethos that involves clothes, a style of talk and walk, a political attitude, and often a philosophical posture of asking hard questions and critically challenging established views and values” (p. 61). KRS-One (aka The Teacha) uses the term *hiphopper* to describe cultural practitioners who see hip-hop as a unique, shared “being” and “seeing” (www.templeofhiphop.org). In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall (1994) of the cultural studies tradition offers two paradigms to conceptualize cultural identity. The first speaks to KRS-One’s definition as an essentialized *being*, or “shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (p. 393).

The second paradigm is “a matter of becoming as well as being” (Hall, 1994):

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (p. 394)

Hip-hop cultural identities in particular are rooted in an obsession with authenticity politics. Age, along with geographic, racial, class, and aesthetic proximity to the ghetto – the “metaphysical root of hip-hop” (Dyson, 2007) – are the primary benchmarks of “realness.” Whether old school versus new school, East Coast versus West Coast (versus Dirty South), Black versus multicultural, bourgeois versus poor, conscious versus commercial, Dyson (2007) argues that these debates are ultimately about “what’s best

seen as black, and what's seen as the best of our blackness, the most authentic form of black identity" (p.9).

From minstrelsy to Beat and Black Arts poetry, and more recently with rap music and spoken-word poetry, White America has a complicated history of genuine and voyeuristic interests in the consumption and production of Black culture (Somers-Willett, 2009). Internal debates regarding who can and cannot authentically research and/or teach hip-hop stem from this history. For KRS-One, mastery of one of the "core four" (DJing, MCing, breakdancing, and graffiti) is a prerequisite for one to authentically research and/or teach how we live (www.templeofhiphop.org). Dyson (2007), on the other hand, shares a more inclusive, optimistic perspective. He writes:

It's almost irrelevant to me whether or not you grew up there (the ghetto). It's more important to know if you're able to scrutinize the possibilities, the positions, the moods, the dispositions, the interests, the sentiments, and the morality that the environment breeds. If you're able to tap into those things and understand what they might mean – if you're able to imagine in your art the story and myth that should be told – that's just as fine as being there. (p. 11)

Whereas Dyson was speaking specifically about the *art* of hip-hop music, my focus is the art (theory) and science (praxis) of teaching and learning with hip-hop. In "pure knowledge" (Labaree, 2004) disciplines such as cultural studies that are primarily oriented toward the construction of theory, esoteric intellectual exercise is both encouraged and expected. In contrast, "Disciplines that produce applied knowledge," like education, "focus primarily on the practical issues that arise from specific contexts" (Labaree, 2004, p. 66). The task of remixing "ed schools" is further complicated as the field straddles the jagged fence between the Tower and public policy. The latter which has been pushed further and further to the right over the past thirty years (McLaren, 2007). Without determined efforts to apply the pure and "soft" educational knowledge of

hip-hop culture to urban educational policy and practice, the nature of the academy's interests (hip-hop scholars included) in hip-hop will not escape suspicion.

I argue that the field of hip-hop studies (and cultural studies), in particular researchers interested in theorizing hip-hop's cultural identity politics, would benefit from ethnographic studies that consider the dynamic and often unexpected ways hip-hop cultural identities are psychologically and discursively constructed and "performed" (Dimitriadis, 2001) in their naturalistic settings. Additionally, and perhaps more important to present discussions of HHBE and critical multicultural teacher education, capturing and interrogating the *stories* and *myths* teachers – self-identified hiphoppers *and* non-hiphoppers – tell about themselves and the 'other' in interviews and the classroom will help hip-hop scholars and educational researchers to first identify, then solve the problems associated with the theory and praxis of teaching and learning with hip-hop in "ed schools."

HHBE as Critical Multicultural Teacher Education

The multicultural education movement comes in response to the oppressive racial and social politics operating overtly and covertly in and around schools during the 1960s and 1970s (Banks, 1995). In the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (1995), Banks defines multicultural education as "a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies" (p. xii). The five dimensions (goals) of multicultural education include academic achievement, curricular integration,

multicultural knowledge construction processes, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture and structure (Banks, 1995).

Despite the proliferate academic debate and educational industry that have flourished over the last 40 years, May (1999) argues “multicultural education has had a largely negligible impact to date on the life *chances* of minority students, the racialized attitudes of majority students, the inherent monoculturalism of school practice, and the wider processes of power relations and inequality which underpin all these” (p. 1). The transformative potential of multicultural education has been compromised by what Vavrus (2002) describes as “assimilationist accommodations.” Both the “conservative multiculturalism” of the Right (e.g. “additive” curricular approaches to cultural themes and heroes (Banks, 2010)), and “liberal multiculturalism” of the Left (e.g. *we’re ALL the same*) (McLaren, 1994) leave Eurocentrism undisturbed.

Critical multiculturalism (and critical multicultural teacher education), as articulated by May (1999),

...incorporates postmodern conceptions and analyses of culture and identity, while holding onto the possibility of an emancipatory politics. It specifically combines multicultural/antiracist theoretical streams which have, for too long, ‘talked past each other’. It emphasizes the crucial links between theory, policy and practice, providing a critical and practical account of culturally pluralist forms of schooling. And finally, it lends itself to the possibilities of a cross-national dialogue in which the differing theoretical and practical concerns of a variety of national contexts can be reflectively and reflexively explored. (p. 8)

Current discourse in critical multicultural teacher education has centered on the expanding “demographic divide” (Banks, 1995; Dilworth, 1992; Gay & Howard, 2000) between urban teachers and students, and questions of how, if at all, to prepare a largely White, middle-class teacher (and teacher-educator) workforce to become multicultural learners capable of understanding and appreciating diversity (Lowenstein, 2009). In

response to Lowenstein's review of the representation of racial identities of White prospective teachers in educational research, Lensmire and Snaza (2010) make three suggestions for researchers and teacher educators striving to narrow the demographic divide: (a) assume (or at least entertain the notion of) an ambivalent White self, (b) White ambivalence both endangers and enables a multicultural and antiracist teacher education, and (c) teacher education, is among other things, a site of hegemonic struggle among White people (p. 420).

Heeding the advice and warnings included in Lensmire and Snaza's (2010) prescriptions, in addition to KRS-One's concerns of authenticity, I extend the conceptions and arguments of Banks (1995) and Dyson (2007) to frame HHBE as a strand of critical multicultural teacher education for the benefit of *all* teachers and students. Underscoring the absence of hip-hop epistemologies and ontologies in the research on teacher beliefs, Bridges' (2009) dissertation study on the life histories of Black male teachers of the hip-hop generation adds often ignored voices that positively contribute to the discourses of critical multicultural teacher education noted above. According to Bridges (2009), "[The hip-hop generation's] experiences with racism, social and political movements of the past, and hip-hop have engendered among them a set beliefs about teaching students of color in U.S. schools, that has been undiscovered and under-theorized" (p. 13). His analysis of participants' oppositional narratives revealed six themes that reflect ways in which Black male teachers' educational politics were related to hip-hop culture: "(1) Commitment to urban spaces, (2) transformative pedagogies, (3) character development, (4) hip-hop culture as a means to understand, particularly, African-American male youth, (5) hope for the future, and (6) the

recruitment and retention of African-American male students in the field of education” (p. 194).

I contend that the literature on critical multicultural teacher education has insufficiently considered the possibilities of hip-hop’s educational politics as a means of accomplishing the goals of multicultural education, especially in urban contexts of schooling. Data generated in this dissertation study of a demographically diverse cohort of English/language arts teachers that integrate hip-hop texts and knowledge construction processes into their curriculum and pedagogy fills two glaring holes in critical multicultural teacher education (and HHBE) research. In addition to an oppositional narrative of a Black male teacher of the hip-hop generation, I also present critical and practical accounts of how two Black female teachers of the hip-hop generation and one White male teachers’ “questions of (cultural and racial) identity” (Hall, 1996) worked to “endanger and enable” (Lensmire and Snaza, 2010) the emancipatory possibilities of hip-hop’s educational politics. Cautious of what Bridges (2009) terms as the “great white hope ideology,” I contend that hip-hop epistemologies and ontologies can inform school systems’ and teacher education programs’ initiatives to impart, model, and advance the teaching dispositions (beliefs and actions) essential to maximizing the academic achievements of urban youth for the vast majority of teachers (and teacher educators) who are not Black, male, or hip-hop.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A Review of the Literature

The product of Ladson-Billings’ ethnographic research on the pedagogical excellence of effective teachers of Black students (1990; 1992a; 1992b; 1994; 1995a;

1995b), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) emerges from the multicultural education tradition to offer both a theory and practice that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequalities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469). Ladson-Billings’ (1995b) qualitative methodologies locate effectiveness in a “range or continuum of teaching behaviors,” specifically teachers’ conceptions of the self and other, the structure of social relations in the classroom, and teachers’ notions of knowledge (p. 478). As a matter of argumentative and methodological clarity, I use the phrase *teaching practices and behaviors* to set apart the distinct, yet complementary instructional, as well as social, cultural, and political aspects of teaching and learning, also known as *pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Contending that reeducating prospective teachers in expanded notions of pedagogy, culture, and knowledge positively influences the academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness of Black students, Ladson-Billings (1995b) points to teacher education programs and the hegemonic epistemologies operating within them as the optimal sites and substances of school reform initiatives.

Researchers of HHBE have primarily used theories of critical pedagogy (Emdin, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Stovall, 2006) to frame their respective teaching practices, behaviors, and outcomes. Despite sharing many similarities, particularly the emphasis on building on students’ lived experiences and expanding notions of teaching and learning, Ladson-Billings (1992) points to the difference in subjectivities as the distinguishing factor separating critical (Giroux & Simon, 1989) and cultural relevant pedagogy. She states, “While critical

pedagogy seeks to help the *individual* critique and change the social environment, culturally relevant pedagogy urges *collective* action grounded in cultural understandings, experiences, and ways of knowing the world” (p. 382-383). My interests in the ways subjectivities of hip-hop culture can be used to meet the academic and socio-cultural needs of urban students lead me to side with Hill (2009) and position hip-hop pedagogy as a culturally-specific form of culturally relevant pedagogy subsumed within the metadisciplines of HHBE and critical multicultural teacher education.

In the following section I show how researchers interested in the effective teaching practices and behaviors for students of color have taken a variety of methodological approaches in the investigation of academic and socio-cultural outcomes associated with culturally relevant pedagogy.

Academic Achievement. Academic achievement is the primary ambition of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). However, only a small number of scholars have employed quantitative research methods to explore the facilitative effects of CRP on academic achievement (Bell & Clark, 1998; Brenner, 1998; Lee, 1995). Lee (1995) presents empirical evidence of culturally relevant texts and instructional practices improving the achievement of urban students. Statistically significant gains were found in experimental groups where “signifying,” a form of figurative language unique to the Black community (Lee, 1995), was used in “cognitive apprenticeships” to scaffold students’ cultural foundations to literary interpretation strategies.

Bell & Clark (1998) examined three treatment groups and the effect of culturally relevant texts on African-American students’ reading recall and comprehension. Participants of Story Treatment Condition I listened to a story with Black characters and

African-American themes. In Story Treatment Condition II students listened to a story with White characters and Euro-American themes. Story Treatment Condition III had students listen to a story with Black characters, but Euro-American themes. Findings support the hypothesis that Black children recall and comprehend stories that are consistent with their socio-cultural experiences.

Brenner's (1998) three-dimensional study combines ethnographic, cognitive, and classroom analyses of mathematics instruction relevant to the socio-cultural experiences of Native Hawaiians. Participant-observations and interviews identified students' out-of-school literacies from which Brenner and colleagues created culturally relevant content, instruction, and assessments. A quantitative comparison of an experimental and control classroom was then conducted to measure the influences of "situated cognition" on students' performance on standardized math tests. Children in the experimental classroom made significant cognitive gains and demonstrated positive reactions to the new curriculum.

Cultural Competence. A central tenet of CRP present across the literature is that teacher effectiveness and student achievement "extend beyond classroom boundaries" (Calabrese, Goodvin and Niles, 2005, p. 442). *Cultural competence*, according to Ladson-Billings (1995b) calls for teachers to "provide a way for students to maintain their culturally integrity while succeeding academically," p. 476). The third goal of CRP, *cultural critique*, is commonly discussed in the literature as critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is an awareness of how lived experiences shape "the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) in, of, and with which one lives, learns, and works (Freire, 1970/2000).

There is a wealth of qualitative studies supporting Ladson-Billings' (1995b) assertion that minority students perform at higher levels when their own cultures are celebrated (Ensign, 2003; Hollie, 2001; Howard, 2001; Sheets, 1995; Stuart & Volk, 2002; Tate, 1995). Howard's (2001) qualitative case study examines the effective teaching practices of four elementary teachers in urban schools. One of the most widely cited inquiries of CRP, this study identifies three major pedagogical themes consistent with the literature. For one, teachers employed "holistic instructional strategies" aimed at improving students' "academic, moral, and social competencies" (p. 186). Secondly, teachers displayed "culturally consistent communicative competencies" as they used African-American students' modes of expression and discourse styles to deliver content knowledge, as well as critique the use and appropriateness of African-American Vernacular English. Finally, understanding students' negative experiences with school, teachers engaged in "skill-building strategies" directly instructing students in the "rules" of academic tasks.

Hollie (2001) observed the "instructional difference" of teachers in Los Angeles' Language Affirmation Program (LAP), a comprehensive language awareness program designed to meet the needs of African-American, Mexican-American, Hawaiian-American, and Native American students who are not proficient in Standard American English. The six instructional approaches were as follows: (a) build teachers' knowledge, understanding and positive attitude toward non-standard languages and the students who use them, (b) integrate linguistic knowledge about non-standard language into instruction, (c) utilize second language acquisition methodologies to support the acquisition of school language and literacy, (d) employ a balanced approach to literacy acquisition that

incorporates phonics and language experience; (e) design instruction around the learning styles and strengths of Standard English language learners, and (f) infuse the history and culture of Standard English language learners into the instructional curriculum.

Ensign (2003) observed, interviewed, and collected artifacts from effective teachers in urban elementary schools in New Haven, CT. Ensign (2003) witnessed greater engagement when students composed and solved “culturally connected” math problems based on their experiences paying rent and other utilities, how they earned money, and protecting themselves from being cheated. Students’ performance on unit tests from the textbook publisher increased through the use of student-generated problems versus those found in the textbook.

Critical Consciousness. The research on CRP and critical consciousness (Lipman, 1995; McGill-Franzen, Lanford, & Adams, 2002; Newell & Sweet, 1999; Tate, 1995), describes teachers who “help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). In a similar vein as Ensign (2003), Tate (1995) collected and analyzed interviews and artifacts (e.g. legislative resolutions, newspaper articles, videotapes) from a culturally relevant math teacher in a predominantly African-American middle school in an urban district in the southwest. Ms. Mason’s three-step approach asked students to identify, research, and combat the problems affecting their community. For example, in response to personal experiences with alcoholism, students investigated and reconstructed the system of tax incentives enjoyed by liquor storeowners. More than teaching students to solve math problems from a textbook, Ms. Mason’s “pedagogy of social change” taught students to be critical and active participants in the democracy.

Lipman's (1995) ethnography of two restructuring junior high schools with sizable African-American populations captured teachers using content and discourses that affirmed African-American culture in effort to unveil the dominant "codes of power" for students. Furthermore, Lipman (1995) illustrates how exemplar teachers of African-American students, their pedagogical knowledge and perspectives, are marginalized at the school and district level despite their effectiveness.

In McGill-Franzen, Lanford, & Adams (2002) we see examples of critical literacy strategies being used in urban early childhood programs. This qualitative case study found that children developed cognitively and socially when teachers validated students' cultures while simultaneously interrogating the power dynamics of school and society. The researchers also found a lack of these effective teaching practices and behaviors in "Head Start" programs with less resources and greater regulations.

Newell & Sweet's (1999) shows some of the creative ways teachers negotiate the curricular, as well as pedagogical constraints in under resourced urban schools to meet the academic and socio-cultural needs of African-American students. The teachers and students observed and interviewed by Newell & Sweet (1999) reshaped the Eurocentric curriculum in a 10th-grade world literature class around themes of ethical choices and social justice. Newell and Sweet's (1999) curriculum and pedagogy was reinvented in three ways: (a) the selection of appropriate literary texts to accomplish differing curricular goals, (b) decisions regarding the concepts and information that can be meaningfully covered within a more integrated and culturally relevant curriculum, and (c) the selection of strategies for engaging students in and supporting their discussion and writing to allow them to enter and participate in the curricular conversation.

Making the Case: First Things First. The literature reviewed above affirms the following factors as the characteristics of effective teachers influencing the achievement of marginalized student populations: culturally responsive instruction, mastery of content knowledge, active engagement with curriculum, understanding how students learn, and meeting students' needs. Considering the political realities of high-stakes testing and quantitatively measurable indicators of teacher effectiveness, the case for culturally relevant pedagogy's effectiveness would be strengthened by additional experimental studies of its facilitative effects on academic, as well as socio-cultural outcomes.

In all honesty, this study does not speak to that issue directly. My intention is to make the “strange” – non-researching hip-hop based educators – “familiar” by contextualizing and clarifying their many instructional, social, cultural, and political complexities. As Brenner (1998) demonstrates, the social dimensions of the culture-sharing group (e.g. dialect, lived experiences, worldviews) must be identified and elucidated before experimental studies can quantify the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies. Through participant-observations and ethnographic interviews of cohort members' conceptions of self and other, structure of social interactions inside and outside the classroom, notions of knowledge, and the varying modes of achievement teachers promote (or not), this study exposes the variables and outcomes that merit further empirical analysis. It is unlikely that this dissertation will sway policy-makers and teacher educators who continue to marginalize the methods and motivations of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical multicultural teacher education (Hirsch, 1988; Schlesinger, 1991; Stotsky, 1999). Nevertheless, I proceed in an effort to reinvigorate conversations on the role, purpose, and function of culturally relevant pedagogy by complicating

hegemonic conceptions of effective teaching; where it is attributed, how it is measured, and most importantly, how it is taught.

The Academic and Socio-cultural Outcomes of HHBE

The academic outcomes of HHBE English/language arts classes have been evidenced by the likes of Hill (2009) and Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002), influential contributors to the canon. In Hill's (2009) "Hip-hop Lit" course for troubled youth in Philadelphia, as well as Morrell & Duncan-Andrade's (2002) "traditional" 12th-grade poetry class in Northern California, students exhibited a broader grasp of literary terms and figurative language used in hip-hop texts and "classical" poetry.

Emdin (2008) and Stovall (2006) illustrate the ways HHBE improves students' cultural competence in science and social studies classrooms respectively. Through the "Three C's" of cogenerative dialogue, coteaching, and cosmopolitanism, Emdin (2008) used students' connections to hip-hop culture to reimagine urban science classrooms as a liberatory, agentive space. Cogenerative dialogues describe conversations where students and teacher share positive and negative classroom experiences and take proactive steps towards transforming instruction, curriculum, and learning environments to reflect those positive experiences. Students previously oppressed by what Emdin (2008) calls "corporate spaces" demonstrated greater motivation when power was disseminated through the practice of coteaching. Finally, the corporate space was renovated into a communal space by taking collective responsibility for each other's successes and failures.

Stovall (2006), a teacher-researcher facilitating workshops in a high school social studies class in Chicago, describes how youth “actualize themselves” through hip-hop music. For instance, Stovall (2006) connected the lyrics and themes from the Brooklyn collaborative, Black Star’s “Thieves in the Night,” with a passage from James Baldwin’s “If Black Language Isn’t a Language, Then What is?” Students engaged in writing exercises and dialogues that questioned the arbiters and standards of truth, both in hip-hop and larger society.

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2005) acknowledge the potential for analyses of hip-hop culture and music to aid in the critical consciousness of urban students, noting, “The knowledge reflected in these lyrics can engender discussions of esteem, power, place, and purpose or encourage students to further their own knowledge of urban sociology and politics” (p. 298). Dimitriadis (2001) and Hill (2009) do just that, explaining how critical readings of rap lyrics provide opportunities for students to negotiate complex lines of racial, aesthetic, class, and generational authenticity. Dimitriadis’ (2001) ethnographic study of a community center in a small midwestern city reveals how two students utilized Southern rap texts to “perform” locally authentic identities connected with national and global notions of Blackness and marginalization. Along similar lines, Hill (2009) describes how the local, cautionary, and oppositional narratives of artists such as Notorious B.I.G. incited discourses around the authenticity politics of “realness.”

New Directions. The literature supports my contention that hip-hop based curricular interventions can help to foster more relevant learning experiences for today’s urban youth. This study takes steps towards assuaging the false dualism of hip-hop based curriculum and pedagogy perpetuated in HHBE scholarship. For example, although

Bridges' (2009) previously cited study moves the field beyond teacher-researcher accounts, amplifying the oppositional narratives of Black male teachers of the hip-hop generation, his particular research method (life history) only told one part of the story. What remain lacking are instructional frameworks detailing the *science*, the ebbs and flows of these “non-traditional pedagogies” as they occur in the classroom. This study addresses limitations of HHBE research by using classroom participant-observations to capture the pedagogical strategies members of the cohort deploy to operationalize the various beliefs about teaching expressed in ethnographic interviews.

From Hip-hop Based Education to Hip-hop Pedagogy

Over and above “a prefigured set of strategies or activities for reaching students through hip-hop culture,” *hip-hop pedagogy*, according to Hill (2009), “reflects an alternate, more expansive vision of pedagogy that reconsiders the relationships among students, teachers, texts, schools, and the broader social world” (Hill, 2009, p. 120). In “Hip-hop as Pedagogy: A Look into Heaven and Soul in Sao Paulo, Brazil,” Pardue (2007) quotes Pimentel (1999, p. 108) to characterize the ways hip-hop, once a “classroom outside of school spaces,” has “conquered” public school spaces:

...hip-hop serves the educator well as a way to penetrate the student imaginary and to discover the factors, which have led to such a disinterest and divestment in public education. [With this knowledge, one can] then develop strategies to recuperate the role of the public school as a stage for real education, based on dialogue, which presupposes the interaction between teachers and students. (p. 687)

Hill (2009) theorizes the distinct yet interconnected instructional, dialogical, and political dimensions of hip-hop pedagogy using the tri-partite “pedagogies *with*, *about*, and *of* hip-hop.” “Pedagogies *with* hip-hop,” the most common form of hip-hop

pedagogy, describes the ways hip-hop cultural products (primarily printed rap lyrics as literary texts) are used to validate students' hip-hop literacies as a means of scaffolding the interests of students to the interests (i.e. curricular goals) of the teacher and/or school (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Hill, 2009; Stovall, 2006). Approaching culturally relevant pedagogy's second and third goals of cultural competence and critical consciousness, "pedagogies *about* hip-hop" call for teachers and students to act as "cultural critics who deploy critical literacies in order to identify and respond to structures of power and meaning within hip-hop texts" (Hill, 2009, p. 122). Through celebrations and critiques of the cultural self, teachers and students tender poignant commentaries of the vulgar, violent, misogynistic, and materialistic messages propagated by rap music and American culture at large (Dimitriadis, 2001; Fisher, 2007; Hill, 2009; Stino, 1995). The third and least developed leg of the hip-hop pedagogical tripod is "pedagogies *of* hip-hop." Pedagogies *of* hip-hop "reflect the various ways that hip-hop culture authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly and explicitly contesting others" (p. 120). In the next section, I use Hill's (2009) pedagogies *with*, *about*, and *of* hip-hop to examine the teaching practices and behaviors depicted in HHBE research.

Pedagogies *with* Hip-hop. The current body of research on HHBE is ripe with accounts of pedagogies *with* hip-hop texts in English/language arts classrooms. I return to Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002) who taught hip-hop texts as poetry in a "traditional" poetry class for 12th graders in an urban high school in Northern California. They witnessed greater levels of student engagement with course content through critical

dialogues of hip-hop and “classical” texts. Students also expressed their interpretations of “post-industrialism” and the alternate vision of America provided by hip-hop music.

Organized around six thematic units (Roots of Hip-hop and Literature, Love, Family, “The Hood,” Politics, and Despair), Hill (2009) used printed rap lyrics as texts in “Hip-hop Lit.” Taking a closer look at the unit entitled, “Roots of Hip-hop and Literature,” songs such as “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “I Used to Love H.E.R.” by Common, “Love of My Life” by Erykah Badu and Common, and “Rapper’s Delight” by Sugar Hill Gang were analyzed for historical content, along with instances of allusion, signifying, metaphor, and plot.

While we are beginning to see studies of HHBE venture into science (Emdin, 2008) and social studies (Stovall, 2006), the functionality of pedagogies *with* hip-hop in the “hard” sciences, as well as elementary classrooms demands further attention. As researchers of HHBE broaden the subject areas and grade levels for which pedagogies *with* hip-hop texts are investigated, Hill (2009) argues that we must also expand our fundamental views of pedagogies *with* hip-hop to include a wider range of cultural artifacts provided by hip-hop.

This study is particularly interested in the ways teachers engage in pedagogies *with* hip-hop methodologies. A prime example of pedagogies *with* hip-hop methodologies is seen in Rice’s (2003) “The 1963 Hip-hop machine: Hip-Hop pedagogy as composition.” Building off of Baker’s (1991) argument that hip-hop is helpful in teaching literacy to “disinterested” college students, he used a “whatever-based invention strategy,” what hiphoppers might describe as *freestyling*, and the analogy of sampling to instruct students in the composition of argumentative essays. Students were encouraged

to set aside their inhibitions regarding formal writing conventions and essentially “lyricalize” (Cobb, 2007), or write without premeditation or fear of reprisal. Much like a hip-hop DJ or producer, students then reformulated isolated and unrelated ideas to construct a new text.

Rice (2003) deserves credit for coining the term *hip-hop pedagogy*; but more importantly, he illustrates how English/language arts teachers can use the “ways of doing” specific to hip-hop culture to introduce new material to students and engage them in guided and independent practice. This dissertation answers Hill’s (2009) call for more ethnographic accounts of hip-hop methodologies being implemented as pedagogical tools that potentially could be used with pre-adolescent students and in subjects other than English/language arts.

Pedagogies about Hip-hop. Pedagogies *with* hip-hop are used in concert with “pedagogies *about* hip-hop” as they require careful negotiations of canonical issues (Fisher, 2007; Stino, 1995), and contentious social issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality, geography, and politics confronting students inside and outside of the classroom. Conceptions of poetry were challenged in Stino’s (1995) study of adult inmates in a reading and composition class, as well as Fisher’s (2007) inquiry into a spoken-word class/club in a Bronx high school. In each case students found that the process of writing raps as poetry was empowering and enhanced self-esteem.

Standing on the shoulders of Dimitriadis (2001), Hill (2009) begins to answer some questions regarding the unexpected, and often contradictory, ways students’ identities impact their engagement with pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop. As a result of relocating the language, cultural capital, and worldviews of hip-hop from the periphery to

the core, students (and teachers) came to see Hip-hop Lit as “more real,” which in turn became a proxy for “authentically Black.” Students who subscribed to essentialist notions of hip-hop or Blackness expressed feelings of validation and empowerment.

Consequently, Hip-hop Lit created new “others” in the form of White students who despite their connections to hip-hop culture were marginalized because of their race.

Just as critical multicultural teacher educators identify a demographic divide among an increasingly White and middle-class teaching force and significantly diverse student population, a similar chasm exists between the theoretically-driven, Black male scholars of the hip-hop generation who publish the bulk of HHBE research and the non-researching teachers who are using (or may be asked to use) pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop. The frustration, alienation, and eventual withdrawal of Hill’s (2009) White counterpart, Mr. Colombo, indicates that sophisticated understandings of hip-hop’s complex cultural-politics are essential. Valid theoretical and practical questions persist as to exactly how teachers’ hip-hop cultural identities influence not only their curricular approaches and pedagogies *with* hip-hop texts, but also their academic and cultural discourses about hip-hop. A more expansive ethnographic study that juxtaposes the variance within a cohort of non-researching teachers’ hip-hop cultural identities, beliefs about teaching, pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop, as well as their respective outcomes will take important steps towards addressing a question looming large over HHBE: *Do you have to be young, Black, and male to effectively engage in hip-hop pedagogies?*

Pedagogies of Hip-hop. By constructing the values, truth claims, and subject positions of hip-hop as “fundamentally pedagogical,” Hill (2009) argues, “we become theoretically equipped to frame practitioners of hip-hop as engaged cultural workers,

critical intellectuals, and public pedagogues whose intellectual production both reflects and constitutes a variety of identities, discourses, and power relationships” (p. 120). For instance, Hill (2009) used the lyrics from Notorious B.I.G.’s “Things Done Changed” to interrogate the generational identities invoked and performed by urban youth. His discourses on the nihilistic images and perspectives offered by hip-hop culture and music typify the kinds of cultural work and public pedagogy described as “pedagogies *of* hip-hop.”

Hill (2009) also acknowledges the difficulties of identifying and isolating practices that “not only defy *a priori* analyses, but also radically challenge sanctioned formations of knowledge and produce new categories of meaning” (p. 121) with unpredictable clientele. Taking into account my own political and professional interests in hip-hop culture and teacher education, I am reluctant to anoint HHBE and hip-hop pedagogy with revolutionary rhetoric at this juncture. Researchers of HHBE must be cognizant of temptations to romanticize the agentive and/or reproductive qualities of pedagogies *of* hip-hop. In an era where K-12 educators and their students face enormous pressures to meet acute definitions of effectiveness and achievement, while not entirely mutually exclusive, it is more than plausible that teachers could be using pedagogies *with* hip-hop texts, not for liberation, but for AYP. It goes without question that current and prospective urban teachers and students would clearly benefit from additional inquiries that undertake hip-hop’s vast array of cultural artifacts and methodologies. Nevertheless, I am wary of exotifying hip-hop based curricular interventions, disregarding complimentary pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop, and depoliticizing the socio-cultural pedagogies *of* hip-hop and HHBE in an effort to make them more “user friendly.”

Before making such leaps we need to learn more about how non-researching hip-hop based educators define effective teaching and student achievement. We need to learn more about what makes these methodologies, dispositions, and/or discourses quintessentially *hip-hop*, as opposed to Black, or Afrocentric (Ginwright, 2004). Are these “unique knowledge claims, aesthetic practices and habits of mind and body” (Hill, 2009, p. 121) deliberate or unconscious? Can these practices and behaviors be taught to cultural outsiders? *Should* they be taught to cultural outsiders? With additional portraits of non-researching hip-hop based educators’ identities, discourses, and power relationships we will be able to deduce with a greater sense of certainty whether teachers are in fact engaging in the “people’s vocation” (Freire, 1970/2000), or merely culturally relevant “banking.”

Building on the theoretical frameworks of Ladson-Billings (1995b) and Hill (2009), this dissertation study seeks to advance theories of HHBE through the systematic collection and analysis of four non-researching hip-hop based educators’: (a) conceptions of self and other, (b) structure of social relations inside and outside the classroom, and (c) notions of knowledge (p. 478). This qualitative data will illuminate teachers’ practices, behaviors, and identities for critical hip-hop scholars, teacher educators, and K-12 educators interested in the possibilities and pitfalls of HHBE in urban English/language arts classrooms. I hope to rekindle a larger school reform debate through a reconsideration of the theoretical imperatives and practical implications of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical multicultural teacher education for a predominantly White middle-class teaching force working in an increasingly “hip-hop nation” (Farley, et. al, 1999).

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodologies are best suited for studies where little is known about a “central phenomenon” and a detailed understanding is required (Creswell, 2008).

Grounded in theories of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and hip-hop (Hill, 2009) pedagogies, I conducted a 5-month critical ethnographic study (Carspecken, 1996; 2001) to explore and understand the practices, behaviors, and cultural identities of four non-researching teachers who employ HHBE in secondary English/language arts classrooms within a small urban school district in the northeastern United States.

The research questions that guided inquiry were as follows (See Appendix A):

1. What are the teaching practices and behaviors of a cohort of hip-hop based educators?
2. In what ways do these practices and behaviors reflect or not reflect hip-hop pedagogies?
3. How is the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies impacted by participants’ cultural identities?

Despite the wealth of peer-reviewed scholarship documenting the teaching practices and behaviors and learning outcomes of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy, Copenhaver-Johnson (2007) notes that NCLB’s (and Department of Education’s) definitions of “highly qualified teachers” and “scientific research” “excludes most studies of qualities and behaviors that cannot be measured under a positivistic paradigm” (p. 41). The resistance to qualitative research “illustrates the politics embedded in this field of discourse” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that politicians and “hard” scientists have deemed qualitative research as “unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective. It is called criticism and not

theory, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism” (p. 2).

Critical ethnography, according to Carspecken (1996), begins with two assumptions that challenge the hegemonic epistemologies and substance of educational research guided by positivistic paradigms. The first is that the value orientation of the researcher determines why and where one conducts research. *Critical* of grandeur of objectivity and absolute truths established historically by White, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual men, post-structural, feminist, and other post-positivistic methodological traditions offer space for researchers to reflect on their cultural experiences, worldviews, etc. (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011). Ladson-Billings (1995b), for example, draws on Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1991) to acknowledge and problematize her standpoint as a Black female teacher educator identifying, interviewing, observing and theorizing effective teachers of Black students. In Chapter 1, I situated myself as a researcher, outlining the moral and political commitments to teacher education and hip-hop culture that shape this study. Contrary to critics who will attempt to use my “native” (Narayan, 1993) status in hip-hop culture to question the study’s reliability and validity, my value orientation as a Black male teacher educator of the hip-hop generation did not “determine” my findings. It does, however, explain why I maintain my commitment to qualitative research and tenets of multicultural education in this Conservative “era of accountability.” It explains why I chose teachers’ conceptions of self and other, structure of teacher-student relations, and teachers’ notions of knowledge as my units of analysis rather than the psychological or cultural deficiencies of students of color. It explains why I selected, and was ultimately welcomed into my research sites. Moreover, it explains

how I will use study findings to combat educational policy and practice that “unconsciously uses the products of purportedly ‘neutral’ research to support and expand a system that discriminates and oppresses” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 7).

Secondly, while foregrounding the researcher’s value orientation is an important starting point (seldom made explicit by positivists), critical ethnography is fundamentally concerned with understanding epistemological issues of power and truth (Carspecken, 1996). Coded within the Conservative politics and common-sense language of dominant discourses on *scientific* research, *highly qualified* teachers, and English *language* and *literature* are arbitrary notions of knowledge that are socially constructed as infallible truths. For Foucault (1969), all knowledge – in this study, pedagogical, canonical, and/or cultural – is formed through “discourse” or linguistic, socio-cognitive, and historical “system(s) of references” (p. 25). Truth (what knowledge counts), writes McLaren (2007), “cannot be spoken in the absence of power relations, and each relation necessarily speaks its own truth” (McLaren, 2007, p. 210).

Building on Foucault’s concept of the “power/knowledge relationship,” and Habermasian pragmatic theories of truth, Carspecken (2001) argues on behalf of critical ethnography’s proficiency in capturing the internal connections between meaning and truth:

Epistemologically, social researchers must defend the validity claims carried by their research report. Substantively, qualitative social researchers are able to reconstruct the validity claims typically made by members of the social group they are studying or by people who routinely act and interact within the site they are investigating. Reconstructing validity claims made routinely by those who are one’s research participants will provide important information about the culture investigated and its relationship to other cultures and social sites within an overall social system. (p. 8)

In light of the shortcomings of HHBE research, as well as my native status in hip-hop, I recognize the importance of sound, ethical methods to support my validity claims regarding what counts as *real* research and *real* teaching with hip-hop (and what does not), against perceptions of bias. Starting with the awarding of honorific titles such as *hip-hop based educator*, I also recognize that in spite of my native status, and familiarity with the language and subjectivities of hip-hop culture, urban schools and communities, I, too, represent a number of “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1969/2002) that reflect various overlapping positions of power – as a middle-class, heterosexual male in the academy – and exclusion – as a racial and cultural minority in America. The power relations between researcher (Black, hipopper, or otherwise) and participant(s) are inherently unequal, and required constant negotiation (and renegotiation) throughout data collection and analysis. In the end, critical ethnography offered me the epistemological rationale and methodological tools (interviews and observations) most appropriate for interrogating my ideological and theoretical standpoints in the field(s), reconstructing teachers’ cultural mediated and historically situated narratives on *real* teaching and *real* hip-hop, and answering my research questions.

This chapter proceeds with a description of the context of study and explication of my methods of data collection and analysis.

Context of Study

Research sites and study participants were selected via “community nomination” (Foster, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995b) solicited a list of expert teachers from church-going African-American mothers, principals, and teaching

colleagues. In this study, *community* was operationalized as K-12 and community-based educators whom I identified in my professional networks in the northeastern United States. Based on their expertise working in and with a range of urban public and charter schools and students of color, I sought recommendations of schools conducive to culturally relevant teaching and learning, or more specifically, exceptional secondary teachers that incorporate elements of hip-hop culture into their curriculum and pedagogy to improve students' academic and socio-cultural outcomes.

After electronic, telephone, and personal conversations with Dr. Holyfield, assistant superintendent of the "Riverfront School District" (RSD), it became clear that we had mutual interests in what he termed "unlocking hip-hop's potential to improve our students' educational experiences." Specifically, he desired professional development workshops on how to (a) bridge a growing generational and cultural gap between administration, teachers, and students, and (b) foster more engaging, yet rigorous English/language arts curriculum and pedagogy. I, of course, was in desperate need of a research site, and had experience curating such cultural- and subject-specific workshops as part of my work with Art Sanctuary. We forged a mutually beneficial arrangement where he would grant me access to the teachers and students of the RSD in exchange for professional development based on the findings.

Riverfront School District. The citizens of Riverfront endure some of the highest rates of deindustrialization, unemployment, and violent crime in the nation. Students often referred to Riverfront as "The M.C.," short for *murder capitol*. The [State] Department of Education has classified the RSD as "in need of improvement." RSD's 2009-2010 NCLB Report Card cites its overall graduation rate at just 56.9% (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2009-2010). This in spite of both schools I surveyed having graduation rates of 100%. Less than half of RSD students take the SAT. Those who do take the test, on average score 100 points less than the state average in each of the 3 areas (Math: District 407/State 515; Verbal: District 394/State 494; Essay: District 394/State: 494). In all, the RSD is comprised of 20 elementary, 10 secondary, and 3 alternative schools that serve more than 13,000 students. The total comparative cost per pupil in the district is approximately \$16,000, about \$2,000 more than the state average.

Participant Selection. Upon gaining approval from RSD's Board of Education to conduct the study, Dr. Holyfield invited me to attend the District's monthly principals' meeting in January 2010. Here, I described my motivations for the study and asked the principals of RSD's five high schools – Central Comprehensive High School (CCHS), Western Comprehensive High School (WCHS), Magnet A, Magnet B, and Magnet C – to nominate exceptional secondary teachers that incorporate elements of hip-hop culture into their curriculum and pedagogy to improve students' academic and socio-cultural outcomes (see Appendix B).

Immediately, administrators from Magnet A politely asked to be excused from completing the survey citing the school's focus on health-related professions. An elder gentleman, later identified as the principal of CCHS, never got back to me after asking for a chance to read the abstract and "give it some serious thought." In all, I collected three participation nomination forms from WCHS, Magnet B, and Magnet C. Each administration nominated 3, 4, and 5 teachers respectively. I assigned each of the 12 nominees a name corresponding to the teacher's gender, school, and order of listing by principal (e.g. Mr. WC1- Ms. C12).

In accordance with Glaser & Strauss' (1967) "theoretical sampling" methods, a brief questionnaire was administered to minimize the differences among the pool of potential participants (See Appendix C). Potential participants were selected or excluded from the study according to the following criteria for inclusion:

1. Participants must be employed as certified, full-time high school English/Language Arts teachers in the Riverfront School District.
2. Participants must have 3 or more years of teaching experience.
3. Participants must: (a) use elements of hip-hop in their curriculum and pedagogy to improve the academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness of students, and/or (b) self-identify as "hiphoppers."

The differences across the population were then maximized in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and cultural identity. My interests in exploring and understanding both the practices and behaviors of HHBE, as well as the extent teachers' cultural identities impact the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies, required a sample population that was pedagogically homogenous, yet demographically diverse. This was done in effort "to increase the density of the properties relating to core categories, to integrate categories and to delimit the scope of the theory" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 43).

Six of 12 (Mr. WC3, Ms. B7, Mr. C9, Mrs. C10, Mr. C11, Mr. C12) nominees were eliminated for failing to meet the first criteria. One nominee was a long-term substitute (Mr. WC3), while others were certified in and taught subjects other than English/Language Arts (Ms. B7, special education; Mr. C9, Mrs. C10, Mr. C11, Mr. C12, performing arts). Mr. WC1 and Ms. WC2 satisfied both the first and third criterion, but were excluded for being only in their second years in the classroom.

Ultimately, I identified four teachers in two high schools who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participation in the study. I used pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants, as well as students I encountered in the field. Magnet B and

Magnet C were thematically renamed as Progressive High School (PHS) and Alvin Ailey Academy of the Arts (4A), respectively. Any personal information about study participants, as well as all audiotapes, hard and electronic copies of transcripts, and analytic memos were stored in a locked room off-site, only accessible to me.

Mr. Westland. Mr. Westland is a 26 year-old Black male and self-identified hip hopper. A proud graduate of 4A and former student of Principal Ardmore and Ms. Oxley, he returned to Riverfront to teach after completing his undergraduate degree in English at a HBCU in the region. Alternatively certified, he received his teaching credentials through the [State] Department of Education's "Provisional Teacher Program." He spent his first year teaching 9th grade English at WCHS. He was now in his 2nd year teaching 10th grade Communications at PHS.

Ms. Brown. Ms. Brown is a 39 year-old Black and Puerto Rican woman who has taught English/language arts in the RSD for 11 years. Before joining the PHS staff three years ago she worked at a middle school less than a mile from PHS. In addition to her responsibilities as 11th grade Communications teacher Ms. Brown teaches adult education courses at PHS three nights a week. A product of the largest public school district and a small liberal arts college in the region, she now lives with her two elementary aged children in the suburbs east of Riverfront. A self-identified "old school" hip hopper, Ms. Brown composed and performed spoken-word poetry in her spare time.

Mr. Candler. Mr. Candler is a 26 year-old White man originally from Northern California. Although he did not culturally identify as a hip hopper, the first two buttons on his radio dial were tuned to the region's hip-hop stations. As an undergraduate he served as the director of his college's radio station while majoring in English and minoring in

Linguistics. Hailing from what he describes as a “teaching family,” his interests in the politics of immigrant adult literacy led him to earning a provisional teaching certificate in ESL. Wanting a change of pace and scenery, he applied to Teach For America “on a whim” and got exactly what he asked for – placement 3,000 miles away in Riverfront. During his first two years in the RSD he worked at CCHS while completing his Master’s at an Ivy League university near the city of study. Mr. Candler had his contract renewed and was now in his 3rd year in the RSD, his first teaching 9th grade Communications at PHS.

Ms. Oxley. Ms. Oxley is a 40-something Black female in her 19th year of teaching in RSD. She has taught English at 4A since it opened its doors ten years ago. Ms. Oxley was born in the largest city in the region, but spent her formative years as the only “darkie” (her words) in an affluent White suburb north of Riverfront. A self-described “political junky,” Ms. Oxley was particularly interested and active in demonstrating against the newly elected Republican governor’s efforts to reestablish fiscal responsibility to the State, starting with concessions from the teachers’ union. She commutes from the southern suburbs of the city of study where she resides with her son.

Progressive High School. Progressive High School (PHS) is a public magnet high school run in conjunction with a non-profit organization that reforms schools based on its educational philosophy of small relationship-based schools and classrooms, individualized “real world” learning, and project-based assessments. Students are admitted through application, interview and lottery protocols. The student population is an accurate representation of the RSD’s population. According to the NCES website, PHS serves 95 African-American and Latino/a students from across the city (75 and 25%

respectively), 70 of which qualify for free or reduced lunch. Now in its fourth year of operation, the school boasts a 96% attendance rate and graduated its first class in 2009 with 100% college acceptance.

The school currently operates out of what is now their second second-hand building. This facility – originally an adult-education center – has no science laboratories, no tech center, or gymnasium. The organization provides each student with a laptop computer, yet the “library” is more like a trailer held up by bookshelves. Sadly, teaching and learning in antiquated, under resourced schools is the norm in Riverfront and cities and districts in similar predicaments.

Nothing, however, is normal about the learning experience and environment fostered by Principal Ardmore (also a self-identified hiphopper) and his staff at PHS. Unlike the two larger comprehensive high schools within the RSD, students and staff at PHS do not operate under the dark cloud of accountability. All students must pass the state’s proficiency examination to meet district and state standards for graduation, but teachers do not “teach to the test.” Eight of 11 of Ms. Brown’s 11th grade students passed the reading portion of the exam on their first trial. Learning objectives are grounded in state standards, but teachers enjoy relative autonomy when it comes to curricular and pedagogical approaches. Students are only “in school” three days a week where they take skill-centered classes such as Communications, Quantitative Reasoning Empirical Reasoning, and Social Reasoning instead of the traditional English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. On Tuesdays and Thursdays students attend non-paid internships aligned with students’ personal and professional interests. Standardized tests and letter grades are not accurate or authentic measures of learning and intelligence according to the PHS

model. Students create quarterly exhibitions that synthesize the skills and content, progress and struggles, experienced in and out of classroom over the course of the marking-period, semester, and/or year. Achievement is assessed by individualized teacher narratives that evaluate the oral and written components of the exhibition, as well as the student's contributions to the community of learners.

Alvin Ailey Academy of the Arts. Alvin Ailey Academy of the Arts (4A) is a public magnet high school that specializes in the creative and performing arts. The goal of 4A is to promote academic excellence and cultural awareness through a diverse college preparatory program. Each of the 153 students applied and auditioned for admission in one of six majors: visual arts, vocal music, instrumental music, creative writing, theatre, or fashion design. 116 of the students are Black, 33 Hispanic, 1 White, and 2 Asian (95 eligible for free or reduced lunch). In 4A, girls outnumber boys 98 to 55. The average score on the Math, Verbal, and Essay portions of the SAT was 373, 370, 390 respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009-2010). Of Ms. Oxley's 44 11th grade students, 39 passed the reading portion of the state standardized test required for graduation.

Students and staff of 4A have earned a distinguished reputation for artistic excellence (fortes are jazz ensemble and modern dance) across the state and region. A true testament of their talent and drive given that the building, erected in 1924 as a "colored" elementary school, does not have a theatre, let alone a stage, to practice and/or host their productions.

Dodging splinters in the rotted dance studio floors is nothing compared to students' walk to and from school. Sitting at a stoplight less than 100 yards from the

school I watched – from the safety of my Ford Taurus – students avoiding “ole heads” drinking tall cans of beer for breakfast; drug addicts and prostitutes soliciting their lunch money all before 8am. Directly across the street from the “secured” front entrance stands one boarded duplex next to two vacant lots and a second duplex on its way to condemnation. Once past the unmanned metal detectors, I was struck by hallways ripe with color and creativity. The walls and floors constantly buzz, resonations from booming voices and bouncing dancers above and around you. While the ring of gunshots during 3rd hour tends to throw this researcher off a bit, Ms. Oxley and her students never missed a beat.

Risks and Benefits. This dissertation study did not present any physical danger or long-range risks to participants. Nor did it place any additional burdens on the Riverfront School District, PHS, or 4A in terms of finances and administrative costs. My biggest concern was not to disrupt the daily routine activities of participants. Teachers were asked to read and sign an informed consent form that explained what participating in the study entailed in addition to their rights as a research subject (see Appendix D). I realized that formal interviews could evoke minimal emotional discomfort as they addressed potentially sensitive topics such as their childhood experiences and encounters with race and/or racism. Over the course of five months, I was privy to numerous conversations regarding participants’ and students’ personal lives. I made it a point to disclose when I was and was not audio-recording conversations in informal interviews. I was also careful not to include any personal information in the manuscript that was not absolutely necessary to support a claim made by the participant or I.

This study was mutually beneficial for the participants as well as the researcher. The interviews benefited participants by encouraging them to reflect on practices and behaviors they often took for granted. Interviews also provided participants opportunities to voice, and in the process, validate their beliefs about teaching and experiences with hip-hop culture. Teachers seemed to appreciate, as Mr. Candler put it, “having another set of eyes in there.” While I was cautious not to impose my own beliefs onto participants or offer unsolicited advice, I was able to provide participants with feedback pertaining to particular curricular interventions or unpleasant incidents I observed from a distance.

Ladson-Billings (1990) describes the task of capturing effective teaching as like catching “lightning in a bottle.” Because of the extraordinary access granted to me by RSD administrators, principals, and study participants, I was able to present snapshots of the lightning – teachers’ practices and behaviors – *and* the bottle, or institutional contexts that shaped teachers’ practices, behaviors, and outcomes. Participants’ life histories provided me with insight into teachers’ motivations for incorporating hip-hop pedagogies into their repertoires. Moreover, I benefited greatly from being able to witness the rare concurrences and frequent ruptures between words spoken and actions taken. Study findings will aid in my efforts to develop theoretical, curricular, and instructional resources for researchers, scholars, and practitioners (K-12 and Teacher Education) striving to improve the academic, cultural, and critical literacies of urban youth.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data analysis is not a distinct stage of research in the ethnographic tradition (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that data

analysis is an “iterative process in which ideas are used to make sense of data, and data are used to change our ideas” (p. 159). My ideas on effective teaching, minority student achievement, and teaching with hip-hop feed all levels of research design and data collection, beginning with the research questions guiding inquiry. The nature of my units of analysis dictated using ethnographic interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and participant-observations (Crane and Angrosino, 1992) for data collection. Once in the field, I used “analytic memos” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) to document the internal dialogue between my ideas and the data. For “formal” data analysis I employed a priori coding schemes (Neuendorf, 2002) and Carspecken’s (1996) “reconstructive analysis methodology” to generate “valid inferences” regarding the teaching practices and behaviors and truth claims that emerged from interview transcripts, observational fieldnotes, and analytic memos (see Appendix E).

Stage 1: Ethnographic Interviews. Qualitative data was collected in three stages: ethnographic interview, classroom participant-observations, and exit interview.

Stage 1 of data collection involved ethnographic interviews. According to Kluckhohn (1945), the ethnographer should serve in the capacity of “a blank screen upon which the informant projects his life” (cited in Crane & Angrosino, 1992, p. 122). These reflexive, semi-structured interviews provided lush accounts of participants’ political, cultural, and educational life histories, beliefs about teaching and learning, and the effects they have on student learning. This particular interview protocol allows the ethnographer flexibility to steer each discussion with directive and non-directive questions according to the peculiarities of each researcher-participant relationship (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Modeled after the ethnographic teacher interview questions in Ladson-Billings' *Dreamkeepers* (1994, p. 194), specific questions included but were not limited to the following:

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?
2. What is your first memory of hip-hop culture and/or rap music?
3. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What is your purpose as a teacher?
4. What is the schooling experience of African American and Latino students in "Riverfront"?
5. How do you perceive hip-hop culture positively and/or negatively influencing urban (African American and Latino) students?
6. What kinds of things have you done with hip-hop in the classroom that have facilitated the academic success of urban students? What hasn't worked?
7. How much of what you know about teaching urban students, in particular teaching with hip-hop, did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?
8. If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be more effective with urban students, what changes would you make?
9. How do you perceive your racial, cultural, and/or generational status impacting your ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with urban students?
10. How do you handle the possible mismatch between what you students need and what the local or district administration wants (e.g., AYP, curricular mandates, politics)?
11. What kinds of positive and/or negative responses have you received from students, parents, colleagues, and/or administrators concerning your practices and/or behaviors, in particular your use of hip-hop?

In an effort to limit disruption of the routine activities of teachers, these sixty-minute, one-on-one interviews were scheduled at their convenience. I met with Ms. Oxley and Mr. Candler in the comforts of their classroom during their prep periods. I interviewed Mr. Westland after school during "teachers' happy hour" (3:00pm Friday) at a local dining establishment. Being that she was so busy and we lived less than 15 minutes away from each other, Ms. Brown and I convened for Saturday morning coffee at a bookstore. Interviews questions and responses were audio-recorded with signed

consent of participants during January 2010 (see Appendix F). I, the primary researcher, transcribed all audio recordings.

Stage 2: Observations. Stage 2 of data collection consisted of 280 hours of classroom participant-observations (see Appendix G). Crane & Angrosino (1992) note, “participant observation is more a state of mind, a framework for living in the field, than it is a specific program of action” (p. 64). Considering the number of field(s) that I was entering – two schools and four classrooms – the requirements of each school and teacher dictated “participating” and “observing” in different capacities than I originally envisioned when designing the study.

In part, this study comes as a response to the methodological shortcomings of HHBE research. To give the appearance of greater scientific objectivity the study was originally conceived with the intent of me being totally removed from teachers’ practices and behaviors. My first day in a school as a researcher rather than a teacher or student, I was quickly reminded that 15 and 16-year-olds are pretty adept at noticing differences, especially the 6’4” Black guy with dreadlocks trying not to be seen in the back of the classroom.

Between researchers from RSD and its parent organization, PHS was under constant surveillance. Principal Ardmore was fully aware that greater objectivity often comes with lower levels of empathy and detachment from the people and places in question. Within five minutes of shaking his hand, he made his expectations of me absolutely clear, stating: “Walking into the building you multiplied the number of Black men with [college] degrees by a third.”

He was not in the market for another social scientist or politician with a clipboard passing through and looking over shoulders. He needed more positive Black male role models for his students; more instructional resources for his teachers, and more *real* accounts of the teaching and learning taking place (or not) in his building and community. If I wanted to conduct research in PHS (or 4A for that matter), I would have to *live* in the schools like the other three Black men with college degrees did. This included donning each school's respective uniform, being transparent with students about my interests and actions, and attending various after-/out-of-school events (concerts, athletic events, end-of-year picnics, graduation ceremonies, etc.) that "showed and proved" I saw the people of Riverfront as more than a data set.

Four unique researcher-participant relationships developed during my time in the fields. The title of "observer-as-participant" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) is a more accurate description of my role with Mr. Westland. Mr. Westland introduced me to his students as "Brother Bernard" and welcomed me as "the newest addition to our family." I observed Mr. Westland while sitting among students and participating as a full-fledged member of their learning community – reading aloud and contributing to classroom discussion and supplying Mr. Westland with an extra pair of hands and eyes during independent practice.

Ms. Brown introduced me to her class as "a graduate student from Temple who is going to help us with hip-hop literacies." I observed Ms. Brown and participated in her learning environment in similar fashions as I did with Mr. Westland. My participation with Ms. Brown went one step further, as I also aided her development of a unit entitled, "Wonder Why They Call You (Bitch)."

Prematurely referred to as “Dr. Hall,” I observed Ms. Oxley from the periphery of the classroom. At her request, we collaborated to revise her unit on the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to contributing to the planning of the unit, I designed and delivered the unit’s introductory lesson, “Harlem Renaissance *Renaissance?*”

I served in a traditional observer capacity with Mr. Candler. I conducted my observations from behind Mr. Candler’s desk. Aside from a brief introduction as “our guest, Mr. Hall” on my initial visit, and an occasional confirming nod (or disconfirming shake), my presence in the classroom was rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

Observations were conducted systematically using a research matrix (see Appendix A) grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Each teacher was observed 1-2 hours a day, a minimum of three times a week over a 5-month period (February-June 2010). Detailed, handwritten descriptive and reflective fieldnotes were taken in order to record my observations (Clifford, 1990). When possible, conversations were documented verbatim in order to accurately capture teachers’ and students’ statements. Informal interviews were conducted before and after each observation, and any relevant artifacts (lesson plans, handouts, etc.) were also collected.

At the onset, observations had a broad focus; describing the general landscape of the field(s) and participant(s). Along with classroom arrangements and décor, I paid close attention to the overall ambiance of the learning environments. With time and familiarity observations became progressively narrower turning to teachers’ specific teaching practices and behaviors.

Preliminary data analysis involved the composition of “analytic memos” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Analytic memos “are not fully developed working papers but occasional written notes whereby progress is assessed, emergent ideas are identified, research strategy is sketched out, and so on” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Considering the vast quantities of data I was compiling, and demands of moving between two schools and four classrooms it was important to be disciplined in my journaling. I committed to spending the last two hours of every day in the field reflecting on my fieldnotes. Initially, the themes of the memos correlated with my units of observation – conceptions of self and other, teacher-student relations, notions of knowledge, hip-hop pedagogies.

It was in this process of “thinking aloud” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) where I first began to notice the data complicating Hill’s (2009) theory of hip-hop pedagogy. Although Hill’s tri-partite was beneficial for me as I entered the field to explore and understand how and why teachers incorporate hip-hop culture into the curriculum and pedagogy, it became increasingly clear that all pedagogies *with* hip-hop are not the same. At this point I doubled back and reanalyzed my fieldnotes and analytic memos using Banks’ (2010) model for multicultural content integration. This framework helped me to qualify hip-hop based curricular approaches within the context of teachers’ hip-hop cultural identities and beliefs about teaching. In Chapter 5 I present thick descriptions of contributions, additive, transformative, and social action interventions that directly address research question #2.

Stage 3: Exit Interview. The third and final stage of data collection consisted of a second round of one-on-one interviews. The purpose of these semi-structured

interviews was to involve teachers in “data triangulation” (Denzin, 1970). Teachers were asked to review typed copies of interview transcripts and fieldnotes prior to off-site meetings scheduled after the end of the school year (late July/early August). I was able to ask lingering questions I had regarding teachers’ life histories, as well as specific teaching practices and behaviors. More importantly, teachers had the opportunity to initiate conversation, confirming and/or contesting my observations. In terms of methodological rigor, these interviews would yield another valuable data set to the study. Epistemologically, they provided a greater sense of reliability and validity to my claims about teachers’ practices and behaviors.

Post-observation Data Analysis. The purpose of research question #1 was to ascertain what, if any, similarities and/or differences exist across what I described as a “pedagogically homogenous, yet demographically diverse” cohort of hip-hop based educators. I analyzed my observational fieldnotes and analytical memos and coded them using heuristics derived from theories of culturally relevant and hip-hop pedagogies.

Initial categories included:

- Practices: Activate prior knowledge, introduce new material, guided practice, independent practice, assessments of learning, classroom management
- Behaviors: Conceptions of self and other; Structure of social relations in the classroom; Notions of knowledge
- Outcomes: Academic achievements, cultural competencies, critical consciousness
- Hip-hop pedagogies: Pedagogies *with* hip-hop; Pedagogies *about* hip-hop; Pedagogies *of* hip-hop
- Race
- Culture
- Gender
- Experience

As was previously noted, the sub-category of “pedagogies *with* hip-hop” was revised as *contributions, additive, transformative, and social action approaches*. I separated *practices* and *behaviors* into two categories to distinguish the instructional methodologies exhibited in the classroom from the beliefs about teaching and learning expressed in interviews. I used ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software to generate matrices that helped me identify and examine the relationships within and across codes and teachers. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, I found the differences among the teaching practices and behaviors I observed to be both more numerous, as well as more noteworthy than the similarities.

To answer research question #3, I re-read interview transcripts and analytic memos using Carspecken’s (1996) “reconstructive analysis methodology.” The first reading centered on “discourse as text,” or the “vocabulary and structure” of teachers’ narratives. “Hip-hop nation language” (Alim, 2006) is rooted in African-American literary traditions of signifying (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972) – as Run D.M.C. put it: “Not bad meaning bad, but bad meaning good.” I treated hip-hop idioms (e.g. *old school, real talk*) as “anthropologically strange,” providing “dictionary meanings” of the terms, as well as interpreting their usage in the specific context of interaction.

The second stage of reconstruction, “discourse as interactive process,” calls for the researcher “to identify and explain the processes of text production, distribution and consumption” (Silva, 2001, p. 106). In an effort to make known the presuppositions I shared as a culture member, I analyzed transcripts and memos paying particular attention to how hip-hop cultural norms explicitly and implicitly influenced meaning making between researcher and participants.

I found the process of making the “familiar strange” to be most challenging and most important when it came to analyzing Mr. Westland’s verbal and non-verbal practices. Coined by Jay-Z, “real recognize real” is a hip-hop idiom that describes the implicit understandings, connections, or respect shared between authentic individuals, be it *real* gangsters, or in the case of Mr. Westland and I, *real* hiphoppers. The moment I walked into Mr. Westland’s classroom and saw a poster of Bob Marley hanging behind his desk he started, as Jay-Z notes, “looking familiar.” My assumptions would be confirmed seconds later when, upon being introduced by Principal Ardmore, Mr. Westland and I shared an impromptu “pound-and-hug” rather than formal handshake. Though never stated explicitly, the poster said something about his purpose as an educator. Our handshake and dreadlocks said something about our politics. And although we were complete strangers, we understood each other perfectly. Considering the students I work with and audiences I write for, I spent as much effort explaining what Mr. Westland “wasn’t saying” as I did explaining what he was “really trying to say.”

Nevertheless, I was slow in recognizing what was “strange” about the narrativizing and signifying practices that Mr. Westland exhibited in interviews and the classroom. As I make evident in Chapters 4 and 6, we both made critical assumptions about the content, form, and meaning of interview questions and responses. *Real recognize real*, Mr. Westland trusted that I knew what he meant when he attempted to clarify his definition of hip-hop as a “youthful identity” by answering with the more abstract similes, hip-hop “sounds like truth” and “feels like bass.” In this instance, meaning was entirely dependent on implicit hip-hop cultural norms that I understood and could reconstruct what *truth* and *bass* sound and feel like.

Through the final reading I sought to understand how the linguistic and socio-cognitive dimensions of meaning making in the micro-level contexts of interaction, operated within the limits and constraints of macro-level power/knowledge relations (Silva, 2001). I was far removed from the field and had done countless readings of the data before I realized that Ms. Oxley's persistence in calling me *Dr.*, and fervent reactions to the words *theory* and *pedagogy* were subtle acts of resistance questioning my (and teacher-educators in general) "expertise" on effective teaching. What did I, a 30-year old graduate student, know about effective teaching that she, a near-20-year veteran, did not already know? I learned a painful, yet productive lesson on how my unconscious use of uncommon discourses of teacher education pushed us further away from one another than our common positions as current and former Black educators brought us together.

Based on these textual analyses, I constructed four typologies – *new school hiphopper* (Mr. Westland), *old school hiphopper* (Ms. Brown), *out-of-school hiphopper* (Mr. Candler), and *no-school hiphopper* (Ms. Oxley) – that describe the ways teachers' psychologically and discursively positioned themselves in proximity to hip-hop culture in interviews and the classroom. In the subsequent chapter, I use these typologies to explain how teachers' various constructions and "performances" (Dimitriadis, 2001) of cultural authenticity affects their respective beliefs about teaching, approaches to hip-hop as texts, and effectiveness in meeting the criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR CONSTRUCTIONS AND PERFORMANCES OF HIP-HOP CULTURAL IDENTITIES

“...the question, and the theorization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the ‘impossibility’ of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged.” – Stuart Hall (p. 16) “Who Needs Identity?”

“I’m like, Che Guevara with bling on, I’m complex...” – Jay-Z “Public Service Announcement”

In this chapter, I illustrate how members of the cohort position “the self” and “the other” to construct and perform hip-hop cultural identities. Textual analysis of interview transcripts reveals that teachers’ notions of hip-hop cultural identities, like all identities (Butler, 1993), operate through a nuanced politics of difference. Ms. Brown self-identified as a hiphopper on the participant questionnaire; however, she drew convoluted lines of distinction between “old school” (e.g. Doug E. Fresh and Will Smith) and “conscious” (e.g. Common and Nas) hip-hop and everything else, namely “commercial” (i.e. on the radio), and Southern rap music (e.g. Soldier Boy and Lil Wayne). In contrast, Ms. Oxley positioned herself *above* hip-hop culture, evoking cultural-deficit paradigms that distanced her political, racial, and class selves from the music and mindset of this “degenerate generation.” By positioning hip-hop as a quintessentially *Black* cultural and political space, Mr. Candler, though steeped in 1990s underground West Coast “Gangsta Rap” and contemporary “conscious” hip-hop, positioned himself at the periphery of hip-hop culture citing his own racial and class ‘otherness’. Finally, in his assertion, “Hip-hop is who we are,” Mr. Westland positions hip-hop as a *being* (Hall, 1996) or “youthful identity” that he, his Black and Latino/a students, and I share in our common subject

positions as “the children of crack and rap”; and a *becoming* (Hall, 1996) that sets him apart from the archetypical hiphopper and teacher.

Teachers narratives shed light on the “pedagogies of hip-hop,” or “various ways that hip-hop culture authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly and explicitly contesting others“ (Hill, 2009, p. 120). I use four typologies – *old school hiphopper*, *out-of-school hiphopper*, *no school hiphopper*, and *new school hiphopper* – to explicate the political processes, discursive practices, and researcher-participant(s) relationships that shaped teachers’ constructions and performances of hip-hop cultural identities. And while no one is one thing all the time, these findings are important as they provide a foundation for subsequent chapters where I elucidate the connections between how teachers’ identify with hip-hop, their beliefs about teaching and learning, hip-hop based curricular approaches, academic and socio-cultural outcomes.

Ms. Brown: *Old School Hiphopper*

Ms. Brown came of age in “the time of the shell top Adidas, name earrings, and asymmetrical hairstyles like Salt-N-Pepa.” She defined herself and hip-hop in the following terms:

Ms. Brown: I’m old school – Doug E. Fresh, breakdancing – *that* was hip-hop. I’d define it as a genre of music whose main purpose was to entertain, but at the same time tell stories that were deep that just captured our attention as young kids.

Me: You put quite the emphasis on “that”?

Ms. Brown: I’ll put it like this. I used to be a real good friend of hip-hop and now I stand almost as an arch nemesis. When we were kids success was promoted; going to college was promoted. Maybe it was the Cosby Show? It was just a different era and a different hip-hop then. Will Smith and “Summertime.” It didn’t promote violence and it didn’t promote like anti-education. The truth is I just feel this vibe from the music that is so anti-education, it’s anti-society, anti-doing anything that’s right almost. And that part really bothers me... but I think that’s why it has to be used.

Ms. Brown draws from the movie, *Brown Sugar* (2002) to describe where she “stands” in relation to hip-hop. The hip-hop-themed romantic comedy hinges on the question (and cliché): *When did you fall in love with hip-hop?* Continuing along this line, Ms. Brown and hip-hop’s “friendship” started in the mid 1980s with a middle-school crush on Doug E. Fresh. Ms. Brown frames Doug E. Fresh, also known as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer,” for his pioneering skills as the “Human Beat Box,” as the essence of hip-hop. “Peace, unity, love and having fun” (Brown & Bambaataa, 1984) – *that was hip-hop* according to Ms. Brown. In this context of interaction, Fresh and breakdancing become symbolic representations of her generational positionality in hip-hop culture.

As high school students, she and her sister defied the word of their father – a Pentecostal preacher – to watch the breakdancing and *battling* (freestyle rap competitions) at the block parties in her Puerto Rican neighborhood. Their relationship matured in the early 2000s as Ms. Brown became intimate with spoken-word poetry during Philadelphia’s neo-soul movement. In addition to composing and performing spoken-word, her “side hustle” included promoting “open-mics,” or live poetry readings for the “grown and sexy” (i.e. Black professionals).

Spoken-word has provided hiphoppers such as Ms. Brown with a “reformed” hip-hop identity (Somers-Willett, 2009) reflective of her age, gender, and middle-class positionalities. In her work on the cultural-politics of popular performance poetry, Somers-Willett (2009) outlines how spoken-word (commercialized slam) and hip-hop wrestle with comparable issues of authenticity and identity, “especially as they intersect with African-American cultural production and address a call to “realness” (p.12). She explains:

The contemporary appeal of a black spoken word poet reflecting hip-hop styles may be that he chooses to express himself using the language of hip-hop within the venue of spoken word poetry, where braggadocio about sexual conquest, drugs, and ghetto violence are not only discouraged but critiqued in a play for cultural authenticity. In this respect, as commercial media portray him (and it bears mention that the image is most often male), the black spoken word artist is often presented as the rapper reformed through poetic expression. (p. 105)

Spoken-word offered an identity (and space) where would-be female MCs like Ms.

Brown had a “fairer” chance to demonstrate their *flow*, or lyrical virtuosity outside the hypermasculine “spectacle” that is hip-hop (Gaunt, 2006; Pough, 2004). More importantly, she was able to perform her cultural authenticity as a lyrical, socially-conscious MC/poet without compromising her “womanness” as a feminine, heterosexual Black woman.

If Doug E. Fresh represents the “Golden Era” of hip-hop in Ms. Brown’s eyes, newer artists like Soulja Boy and Nicki Minaj symbolize what is wrong with the musical aesthetics, lyrical content, and notions of Black masculinity and femininity performed in contemporary, commercially-driven rap music:

Ms. Brown: Bernard, I can’t even listen to the radio anymore. C’mon, “supersoak that ho”[“Crank Dat” by Soulja Boy]? Really? *Really?* Doing that superman dance and everything seems so much fun, but they are saying SUPER-SOAK-THAT-HO. What kind of mess is that? And I understood that like the second time I heard the song. As much as I love hip-hop, I have a BIG problem with hip-hop. Somebody has to provide some balance. I’m going to take Soldier Boy, compare his lyrics to the more socially conscious, like Common, and get them to think about why ejaculating on hoes, excuse me, sells better than uplifting Black women. Or, why calling yourself ‘Minaj’ [Ménage] or [Monica] ‘Lewinsky’ is not cute. Don’t get me started!

Issues of gender – conflated with sexuality – were of particular significance to Ms.

Brown’s *old school* hip-hop cultural identity construction. Yet, as she positions herself (and Common) as moral authorities against Soulja Boy’s (i.e. new school hip-hop’s) objectification of women, her Black feminist stance othered women – symbolically

represented here by rapper Nicki Minaj – that complicated her “traditional,” heteronormative notions of womanness.

Baldwin (1999) argues, “When black families and women are the point of focus, representations of black women stand in for authentic blackness. In turn, the visibility of black female purity or contamination signifies the success or failure of black culture; women’s bodies become terrain on which battles over black authenticity are waged” (p. 160). Nicki Minaj’s open bisexuality challenges the repressed sexual discourses within the Black community that perpetuate non-straight as sexual deviant (Collins, 1991). At the same time, her objectification of the self (and other women) reproduces White patriarchal subjectivities that sexualize lesbian activity. On one hand, her self-authored lyrics supply missing discourses of desire that may be empowering for hip-hop’s predominantly young, female consumers. On the other, her *oversexualized* body (augmented by breast and butt implants) conveys an impossible standard of Black womanhood that is potentially unhealthy.

Ms. Brown echoes the sentiments of many critics inside and outside the hip-hop community, who argue that rap music and its messages of *anti-doing anything that’s right*, in the words of Rose (2008), “hurts black people” (p. 75). While acknowledging the often violent, hypermasculine, misogynistic, and homophobic content of hip-hop music, Rose (2008) pushes back against the scope and tone of such indictments, citing 3 issues:

(1) *unfair generalizations* made through sweeping claims and overblaming; (2) *the tone of disdain and disregard* that is smuggled in under “outrage” and gets misunderstood as tough love; and (3) *what’s left out* – that is, the extraordinary absence of collective responsibility for what’s happened to hip hop and the silence among many critics about structural racism and its heightened impact on the black poor (p. 77).

In our interviews, Ms. Brown painted with broad strokes, leveling charges like: “I think hip-hop is to blame for the low literacy rate.” Anti-intellectualism was a central trope of Ms. Brown’s critique of hip-hop, and, as I illustrate in Chapter 5, her pedagogy. In her defense, she did not think *all* contemporary rap music was bad. She heralded Jay-Z and Kanye West, both commercial in their own right, as “masters of metaphor.”

Ms. Brown’s outrage against the aesthetics and content of “new school” rap music is a manifestation of her class positionality as much as her generational positionality. “In order to combat the ‘negative’ idealizations of blackness,” says Baldwin (1999), “middle-class moral purists (even draped in kente cloth) attack the sexual frankness of hip-hop as ‘excessive’ and tend to support which is understood as ‘positive rap’ because of its Afrocentric rhetoric and/or political awareness” (p. 160). Ms. Brown’s nostalgic appeals to “a different era and different hip-hop” implies that (a) *old school* hip-hop (symbolically represented by Will Smith) is a cultural Eden absent of commercial or misogynistic “serpents,” and (b) *new school* rap music is somehow responsible for the deterioration of the nuclear “Black” family, “traditional” family values (as seen on *The Cosby Show*), and by extension, the academic deficiencies of Black youth.

What did Ms. Brown leave out? Tate (1997) argues, “in concept, hip-hop was never anti-capitalist, pro-black or intentionally avant-garde” (cited in Baldwin, 1999, p. 184). Similar to the ways the storylines of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and *The Cosby Show* necessitate omitting the situational tragedies going on back in the West Philadelphia Will Smith fled, or around the corner from the Huxtables’ Brooklyn Heights brownstone, the commercial interests influencing Will Smith and Doug E. Fresh (and their record labels) were inconvenient to Mrs. Brown’s idealistic narrative on *real* hip-

hop culture and music. Ironically, the artist formerly known as the Fresh Prince epitomizes the best, and in some critics' eyes, the worst of the entrepreneurial spirit that lies at the core of hip-hop (KRS-One, 2003).

With regards to the evolution of the “postmodern” family, Stacey (1996) notes, “postindustrial conditions have compelled and encouraged us to craft a wide array of family arrangements which we inhabit uneasily and reconstitute frequently as our occupational and personal circumstances shift” (p. 7). Herself the product of a “broken home,” Ms. Brown recently exercised her right to “reconstitute” her family arrangement, divorcing her unsupportive husband. “Refashioning the infamous Moynihan report” (Baldwin, 1999), Ms. Brown’s moralistic rhetoric discounts the impact neoliberals’ “war on drugs,” the working-class (e.g. Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996), and public education (NCLB) had on the Black family and community during and since the *The Cosby Show* was on the air.

My observations suggest that Ms. Brown’s beliefs about hip-hop are rooted in strong, somewhat nostalgic critiques of contemporary rap music and hip-hop culture. Ms. Brown’s entire pedagogical project was informed by her *old school* hip-hop cultural identity, in particular, her desires to provide tough love and restore “traditional,” i.e. middle-class values. As I will detail in the ensuing chapter, however well-intended, her curricular approaches to hip-hop as poetry yielded mixed results.

Mr. Candler: *Out-of-School Hiphopper*

Playing on the *old school* hip-hop idiom, I use the typology *out-of-school hiphopper* to describe how Mr. Candler positioned himself as a genuine (and voyeuristic)

‘other’ at the periphery of hip-hop culture. In Riverfront, Mr. Candler was an outsider in nearly all respects. He was one of only four White faces in PHS. He was born to an “upper-middle-class family of teachers” from Northern California. He was a graduate of an Ivy League university, not to mention Teach for America. Mr. Candler did not self-identify as a hip hopper; but rap music, the “soundtrack of his youth,” did inform his questions and answers of identity. The *out-of-school hip hopper’s* definitions of and experiences with hip-hop provide valuable insight from the perspectives of racial, class, geographic, and cultural ‘other(s)’ in Black cultural and educational spaces.

Mr. Candler prioritized racialized urban political-economic relations as the foundation for hip-hop’s identity politics:

Hip-hop is... a culture or lifestyle that holds certain political and aesthetic ideals. What do I mean by that? Politically, hip-hop is where the Black Nationalism of the 60s and 70s meets, or should I say collides with the Reaganomics of the 80s. Aesthetically, hip-hop is the elements – you know, MCing, graffiti, breaking, turntablism, all that stuff. That all kinda encapsulates the culture that I attach to hip-hop.

Mr. Candler defined hip-hop culture as quintessentially Black and politically progressive. After reviewing interview transcripts, it appears that Mr. Candler spent more time describing his own collisions with Conservative politics than his congruencies with Black Nationalism. He made the following critiques after the state-wide teacher-student walk-out in protest of the newly-elected Republican Governor’s proposed budget cuts:

Honestly, I find it rather disgusting to hear [Governor’s last name] channel the spirit of Saint Reagan [mockingly looking to the sky] as he slashes our funding or collective bargaining with a smile. The same people on the other side of town or the state who think that teachers are paid too well are the same one’s that think Black people like invented crack and A.I.D.S. [shared laughter] Or forget that welfare saved millions of White people like my ancestors. Their logic, if you can call it that, is disgusting.

Mr. Candler longed to position himself as ‘other’ (i.e. non-Conservative and non-racist) White person. He did not believe in the Reagan idolatry catalyzing Republicans’ (and the Tea Party’s) mission to “take America back.” He did not believe that individual responsibility alone could cure the social ills he attributed to “structural inequality.” He did not believe that welfare and public education were anti-American. What’s more, he performed his otherness through his respect for hip-hop’s cultural and political autonomy, his participation in hip-hop, and in particular, his decision to teach in Riverfront.

When I asked Mr. Candler to elucidate his working definition of *aesthetics*, he did so by separating rap and hip-hop into two different genres of music.

Mr. Candler: So, like when I was a kid, we listened to *rap*. There was a time in the 8th grade when my friend Deacon and I were distributing mixed tapes for... God, it wasn’t Brother Lynch Hung... No, it was X-Raided; and before Andre Nicotene was Andre Nicotene he was Dre Dawg.

Me: You’re really testing my West Coast underground [knowledge] right now!

Mr. Candler: I mean this was underground, Bay Area, “Gangster Rap” [making airquotes]. I remember the cover of one of Brother Lynch Hung’s mixtapes had him muffling this huge shotgun with a pillow. That’s generally a different aesthetic than *hip-hop* music. I think the distinction came with guys like Mos [Def], [Talib] Kweli, J[urassic] 5 and MURS to some extent. For me, Reflection Eternal was as good as it got. So for me the two are different.

What Mr. Candler presented as a matter of discerning taste, was in fact a multilayered critique of the racialized cultural identities (politics) represented in the binaries of “Gangster Rap” and “conscious hip-hop.” Forman (2000) notes that the “gangsta” aesthetic “developed out of a desire to relate incidents and experiences with a more specific sense of place and, subsequently, greater significance to local youths who could recognize the sites and activities described in the lyrics” (p. 213). In this regard, rap offers a means of describing the view from a preferred “here,” of explaining how things appear in the immediate foreground (the ‘hood) and how things seem on the receding

horizon (other places)” (p. 213). Ascending from the ashes of the Oakland-based Black Panther Party and Watts riots, gangster (West Coast) rap is characterized by straightforward, “extreme local” narratives of “the violent outlaw, living his life outside of dominant cultural constraints, solving his problems through brute power and domination” (Dimitriadis, 1996, p. 430). “Conscious” (East Coast) hip-hop bears a greater resemblance of the identity politics of Malcolm as opposed to Huey. Broadly speaking, the East Coast aesthetic emphasizes *verbal* power and domination (word-play and battling), artist-audience interaction, and “knowledge of (racial and cultural) self.”

Further evidence of how individuals historicize cultural identities in the servicing of their own interests, Mr. Candler positions himself as more authentic than the typical 13 year-old, upper-middle-class White kid in the late 1990s. In contrast to the “Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and DMX on the radio” he listened to “underground, Bay Area, Gangster Rap.” Moreover, he did not just listen to non-commercial, non-East Coast (non-L.A.), non-political hip-hop; he was an active participant. As places and times changed, so did Mr. Candler’s metrics of *real*. As an undergraduate on the campus of “California State University” his Marxist becoming compelled a shift away from the gangster to the conscious, trading the spectacle that is the Black man as violent outlaw for that of the Black artist as activist.

With that said, *real* hip-hop like Reflection Eternal (Talib Kweli and DJ HiTek) was not *real*, i.e. sufficiently political, according to Mr. Candler’s standards:

This socially conscious hip-hop got deemed “backpack” [making airquotes] hip-hop to the point it was almost like Marley blasting out of fraternities... I feel like hip-hop is way more into an image of itself than change. I thought it was like so self-referential that it wasn’t actually about movement, it wasn’t actually about transformation, it wasn’t actually about social action. Don’t get me wrong, some folks rapped about it and talked about it, but in my opinion, the people... I mean,

when you go to a concert, not like a stadium concert, but you know, a hip-hop show, it's like all suburban white kids, and it just didn't jive with me.

I was struck by Mr. Candler's allusion to Marley and fraternities. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, the highlight of my music career came as my hip-hop band opened up for The Wailers. I find it incredibly ironic (and in retrospect, equally as troubling) that the venue for this performance was the front lawn of one of the University of Michigan's White fraternities. Despite being widely regarded as the most influential artist of the 20th century, Bob Marley and The Wailers' art and activism has been reduced to the equivalent of Cheech and Chong. Even in *real* spaces like a "hip-hop show," what Mr. Candler believes to be an inherently Black and transformative culture and music is being depoliticized as it is increasingly consumed by voyeuristic, as well as genuine "suburban white kids" such as himself.

By painting hip-hop in such racialized terms Mr. Candler positions himself as 'other' at the periphery or "backseat" of hip-hop.

Mr. Candler: Growing up, I was the only white guy in the car on most occasions.

Me: That was you?

Mr. Candler: That was me, somebody gotta talk to the police, right? [shared laughter] Rapping along with every word, then pausing on the N-word [shared laughter]. Everybody else says it, but I just pause and stay right on beat [shared laughter]. It was in those sessions just ridin' around in the backseat where I learned to play my position...

Here, Mr. Candler performs his proximity to hip-hop in two interesting ways. Again, he touts his prior acceptances into Black spaces as proof of his realness. He goes on to tell an "inside joke" invoking the punchline, "Somebody gotta talk to the police, right?" from a Dave Chappelle sketch where he explains why every group of Black guys should have at least one White guy in it. Using the car as a metaphor for hip-hop – yes, Mr. Candler was in the car, albeit he was in the backseat. Mr. Candler maintained that it was in hip-

hop where he learned of the spoken and unspoken rules he would have to abide by as ‘other’ in Black spaces.

According to Principal Ardmore, in addition to my observations, the task of earning the respect of his 9th grade students and actualizing his progressive politics would prove to be much easier said than done. If hip-hop culture is a “Black thang,” then what are the implications for when a racial outsider – even one who knows “what Jimi [Hendrix] is to the guitar, Lil Wayne is to the mic” – undertakes hip-hop as a pedagogical project?

Ms. Oxley: *No-School Hiphopper*

Of the four members of the cohort, Ms. Oxley positioned herself the furthest away from hip-hop. For this reason, I use the term *no school hiphopper* to describe Ms. Oxley’s identification with hip-hop. According to Kitwana’s (2002) racially and temporally rigid construct of “African-Americans born between 1965 and 1984” (p. 4), technically, she was a member of the hip-hop generation. Although old enough to remember the first time she heard “Rappers’ Delight” on the radio, in our initial meeting she answered the question, *Do you self-identify as a hiphopper?* with a resounding, “Absolutely not!”

Later in that meeting she refined her position slightly, “I don’t use much rap music in class, but I do bring a little Chuck D with me.”

Still harboring doubts about whether Ms. Oxley met the criteria for participation in the study, I “played dumb” and asked her to explain what she meant by her allusion to Chuck D and Public Enemy.

Partly disgusted, she gasped and said, “You know, Chuck D, as in the opposite of that crusty buffoon Flava Flav? You know, ‘Fight the Power’, ‘9-1-1 is a Joke’? That Chuck D.”

Ms. Oxley would call upon Public Enemy on two other occasions in our first formal interview. Public Enemy became a point of departure marking the beginning of the end of hip-hop’s innocence, and more importantly, Ms. Oxley’s cultural and political identification with this “degenerate generation.”

Whether in formal or informal interviews, the classroom, or staff meetings, Ms. Oxley had plenty to say about just about everything. Despite my many pleas not to put the cart before the horse, one of her favorite salutations was: “Good morning Dr. Hall, what shall we talk about today?” Being that she was such a willing participant in this regard, I found the terseness of her definition of hip-hop to be especially noteworthy:

Me: I’m interested in knowing how you would define hip-hop.

Ms. Oxley: Rap...[awkward pause] music [laughter]. That’s how I’d define it.

Me: Two words...that’s how you’d define it?

Ms. Oxley: Rap music. “Look at me, I’m having fun. Look at me, I can rap better than you. Fight the power! Stop the Violence!” And now I don’t know what that mess is; it’s a shame.

In a similar fashion as Ms. Brown, Ms. Oxley defined hip-hop through a romanticized narrative of what rap music (and Black culture) “used to be.” Speaking as hip-hop, she describes the “good ole’ days” when rap music *used* to be about having a good time and showing and proving one’s verbal prowess. Symbolically represented by the song titles, “Fight the Power” and “Stop the Violence,” it *used* to be about bringing people together to combat external and internal threats to the community.

The turning point in her eyes was NWA (Niggas With Attitude):

Ms. Oxley: To me it [hip-hop] all really changed with NWA. When they came out in the late 80s, woo, it all went straight-to-shit in my opinion. Oh my god! Aww! STRAIGHT FROM COMPTON! Was that it?

Me: “Straight outta Compton! A crazy muthafucka named Ice Cube. From the gang called Niggas Wit Attitudes.”

Ms. Oxley: Yes! Aww man, I was like you’re kidding me! You know, but Public Enemy had started that before they did because I can remember I had just gotten out of college in the late-80s and Public Enemy came out with [rapping] “Bass, how low can you go/ Death row, what a brotha know/ Once again back it’s the incredible!” I remember that, oh man, I remember listenin’ to that and feelin like, like YOU JUST WANTED TO DO SOMETHING ‘cause it was ANGER music!

Me: So you would say the “anger” [making airquotes] of Public Enemy is comparable to that of NWA?

Ms. Oxley: Uh-uh. Noooo. No. No. No. What I’m saying is that there *is* a difference between fighting the power and fucking the police, excuse my French. But with them came that shift in tone, everyone decidin’ to be hard muthafuckas and like emulating jail life. Now it’s ‘F’ the teacher, ‘F’ the old lady, ‘F’ everybody! And now they really ain’t rappin’ about nothin’. How much money they have, how many girls they bagged, and their rims. Yes, their rims!

With a bit of prodding, Ms. Oxley did differentiate between fighting the power – collective resistance against systems and symbols of racial oppression – and ‘F’-ing the police – what she constructed as anarchism. As “the only darkie” (her grandmother’s words) in her White, suburban high school and a recent graduate from a HBCU, she did identify with the anger, or politics, represented by Public Enemy. However, from her position as teacher, Ms. Oxley rejected outright that there was any hint of legitimacy to the politics behind “niggas’ attitudes,” especially the idea that schools and teachers could be viewed as systems and symbols of racial oppression.

Instead, she summons up a conservative ethos of rugged individualism to ‘other’ the “submerged tenth” (DuBois, 1899) of the Black community:

Ms. Oxley: Look, we was broke! I mean B-R-O-K-E broke. My mama used to scrub White people’s floors; my grandma worked a bunch of different factory jobs. I don’t come from a middle-class background, but they instilled in me a middle-class mindset.

Me: A middle-class mindset? How is that different from what you see here?

Ms. Oxley: Well, I think too many of these folks are stuck in the hood in their minds. And they're always defendin' the hood like it's somethin' great. No, there's something wrong. The hood is crazy. The hood is like a psychopath. Just like they say corporations are like a psychopath, this hood mentality is like crazy. How they overreact to everything. Everything is crazy! Everything is emotional! And nobody thinks logically. I didn't grow up like that. I didn't grow up in a hood. I even talk to some grown folks now talkin' bout they grew up in the hood. No you didn't! Maybe you pretend in your mind it was the hood. I just think... you know, I didn't grow up with much and my folks struggled the whole way but they made it nice for us. They went through great personal sacrifice and didn't make all these excuses.

The romanticization of the hood, specifically the notion that being poor is a prerequisite to authentic Blackness, was a prominent theme of Ms. Oxley's critiques of hip-hop culture. Ms. Oxley still bore psychological wounds sustained in her personal struggles with questions of racial and cultural identity in both White and Black spaces. In the affluent suburb she attended high school she was 'other' – conspicuously too Black (dark-skinned) and too poor. Once in the Black spaces (her HBCU and Riverfront) she longed for, she realized she was still other – still too Black, but now not poor enough.

From 50 Cent's motto "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" to Cam'ron's "Rather be judged by 12 than carried by 6," rap music has celebrated a nihilistic "hood mentality" of "horrific meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness" (West, 1994, p. 277). Yet, while Ms. Oxley acknowledges the prevalence of institutional racism in America, she elicits what West (1994) describes as a "vulgar rendition of Horatio Alger in blackface" (p. 21) in her suggestion that a restoration of Protestant ethics in the Black community would somehow bring the industrial economic base back to Riverfront. Or suddenly make the water in the drinking fountains and bathrooms safe for human consumption. Or erase "these folks'" individual and collective memories in and of "second-class schools."

Although Ms. Oxley was politically progressive, socially and culturally her beliefs about hip-hop were aligned with the likes of McWhorter (2008) on the far right-wing of the hip-hop generation's ideological spectrum. Like the title of McWhorter's (2008) book, *All About the Beat: Why Hip-hop Can't Save Black America* implicates, the *no-school hip hopper's* narrative expressed skepticism of the political, and by relation, pedagogical potential of hip-hop. Recognizing her students affections for "the beat," as well as the expanding generational gap between her and her students, Ms. Oxley did seek my assistance in using hip-hop as a scaffold to *real* Black culture and literature as seen in the Harlem Renaissance. The data indicates that Ms. Oxley's curricular approaches to hip-hop as literary texts appeared to reinforce "the power" more so than fight it.

Mr. Westland: *New School Hiphopper*

"Immersed in hip-hop as a child," Mr. Westland did not practice one of the four elements, yet self-identified as a hiphopper. A survivor of Riverfront's South Side, alum of 4A, a former student of Ms. Oxley and Principal Ardmore, and current resident, the *new school hiphopper* became my most reliable informant in his willingness to disclose intimate details regarding his experiences living, learning, and now teaching in Riverfront.

The ensuing passage is illustrative of the candor Mr. Westland brought to our interviews, as well as the classroom:

Real talk, I know what it's like to come home to play Playstation only to find out that your mama pawned it to feed her habit. I know the feeling of getting suspended from school for having to crack a nigga head for clowning the fact that my mother was, and still is, an addict. They [my students] can't imagine being 11 or 12 and being responsible for getting your little brother out of bed to go to school. How much help on homework do you think I got as a kid growing up? My

grandmother loved me, God rest her soul [looking down at R.I.P. tattoo on the inside of his right forearm], and she'd do anything for me, but she wasn't much help getting me to the SAT, or band practice.

Mr. Westland prefaced his statement with the phrase *real talk*. In this instance, Mr. Westland uses the hip-hop idiom to indicate to me that what he was saying and how he was saying it were unabashedly honest and sincere, i.e. *real*. He did not hide his mother's battle with addiction from me or his students. Nor did he cover up his own struggles in school, or the tattoos adorning his forearms paying tribute to his deceased grandmother and best friend.

Both in the content and the form of his discourses (verbal and non-verbal), Mr. Westland positions himself inside Riverfront, inside poverty, and inside hip-hop culture. More interestingly, he positions hip-hop inside him (and me) as a unique cultural-political identity. In doing so, he also positions my students – generalized as white, middle-class prospective educators – and cultural outsiders at large as inauthentic 'others' for their inability to comprehend just how real it is Riverfront.

Mr. Westland defined hip-hop in the following terms:

The easiest way to define hip-hop would definitely be as a youthful identity. And when I say youthful identity, I mean that hip-hop is who we are. Sometimes people say that it has turned into a culture and I think that when you think about cultural movements, how do they start? They start as a few individuals adapting to their local conditions. For hip-hop this was poor, Black, and Latino kids adapting to the Bronx. Over time the actions, the individuals, and the environment have spread beyond the local. The individuals might not even be young anymore. They may not even live in the hood anymore. But it's a part of us, a part of how we see the world. If hip-hop isn't a culture, what is?

In this context of interaction, sitting across the table from a performing expert of hip-hop (and teacher education), Mr. Westland positions himself next to me as cultural insiders through his use of first-person pronouns *we* and *us*. He situates himself as expert by

demonstrating his knowledge of hip-hop's origins and the processes of globalization that have pushed deindustrialization and hip-hop culture beyond local social, political, and geographic boundaries.

Considering the students I work with and audience I write for, my follow-up questions sought further clarification of this collective, "youthful identity":

Me: When you say hip-hop is who we are, how would someone from Mongolia, I don't know, Mars, know? What does hip-hop look like? What does it sound like?
Mr. Westland: It sounds like truth. It feels like bass. It looks like graffiti, you know what I'm saying, fresh and loud colors. On occasion it smells like marijuana [shared laughter]. You got me on taste.

His statement, "it sounds like truth" is an affirmation of hip-hop culture's ontological existence as a way of being and seeing the world. As Mr. Westland would put it in later conversations, "You're looking at someone who learned more about the power of the English language, African and African-American history from dropouts like Nas and Dead Prez than any teacher in this district." The truth, according to Mr. Westland, is that teachers, like policemen and politicians, cannot be trusted. The truth is that hip-hop music and culture provides youth deemed illiterate and hopeless by schools (and society) with powerful counter-narratives depicting the realities of America.

"Feels like bass" refers to how the drum-driven music (and its underlying messages) resonates within its people in ways that transcend entertainment and "taste." In style, as well as in substance, there was a similar kinesthetic quality about Mr. Westland's voice and presence in the classroom. He taught with a passion and purpose that his students could understand or "feel" – not only cognitively, but physically and emotionally as well (Petchauer, 2011).

Mr. Westland points to the aesthetics of graffiti to describe hip-hop's style of "refusal" (Hebdige, 1979). Chang (2005) writes, "In every generation, radicals nurture scorn for authority and the old. They tap into a desire to destroy convention and induce shock. They demand tribal commitment and discipline. They risk everything to bring the new into being" (p. 125). Whereas Chang was speaking of the art and vandalism that is graffiti, in many ways the oxymoron of art and vandalism is an appropriate metaphor for Mr. Westland's teaching practices and behaviors. In interviews, as well as the classroom, Mr. Westland displayed what Shusterman (2005) describes as "aesthetic violence". His confrontational style did not let political correctness or fear of disciplinary reprisal get in the way of truth. As I will demonstrate in greater detail later in Chapter 6, Mr. Westland took pride in committing "English teacher blasphemy" in the ways he destroyed (and rebuilt) curricular and pedagogical conventions to raise the consciousness of his students. Though tongue-in-cheek, his allusion to marijuana underscores how hip-hop's refusal of dominant ideologies, while uplifting in the moment (pun intended), carries along with it potentially reproductive consequences.

Hall's (1996) theories of cultural identity offer an insight that can be applied to Mr. Westland. His assertion that hip-hop is "who we are" is actually about "becoming rather than being" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). In the succeeding excerpt, Mr. Westland reflects on the tensions that come with being hip-hop:

Hip-hop affects all I do... Snoop turned me out at like 7, 8 years old! Me and my brother used to sit next to the radio and rewind over and over again trying to write down and memorize his lyrics. When I think back, there's something troubling about an 8 year-old listening to "Gin and Juice" – very troubling. But at the same time, you wonder why I've always had a way with words? 'Cause I been writing down and memorizing lyrics since I was 8 years old! I think I've learned everything I needed to learn to be a good person from hip-hop. But honestly, the way the media and corporate America has overtaken the culture I don't really

identify with things that the typical rapper raps about today. Shooting people, selling drugs; I was around that stuff so much as a kid, and honestly, I still hang with people that do those types of things. I'm proud of where I come from, I really am. But that's not all I am.

Before crediting hip-hop, Snoop Dogg in particular, for teaching him his way with words, he admits that there is something "very troubling" about a 7 or 8 year-old listening to songs about "rolling down the street smoking indo, sippin' on gin and juice." He concedes that commercial interests surrounding hip-hop have overtaken the cultural and political. And while he continues to associate with people and places the "typical rapper raps about today," he stresses that violence and drugs is not all he and hip-hop are about.

Mr. Westland's framing of hip-hop as a "youthful identity" is his attempt to reconcile what seem to be contradictory positions inside hip-hop culture and public schools. In some situations, including this one, the category of youth is a better indicator of an individual's social position rather than biological realities (Bucholtz, 2003). Mr. Westland contends (and presumes) that while "we" – he and I – have grown out of our teenage years, moved out of the ghetto, and assumed positions of authority in the very institutions hip-hop culture emerged in resistance to, we still see the world through "youthful" eyes.

"On the record" and in the classroom, Mr. Westland performed his youth in a number of interesting ways. Set against the contrasting backgrounds of his red and black PHS uniform, he performed hip-hop's refusal of dominant culture by dreadlocking his hair. Though the style dates back to the dawn of civilization (Mastalia and Pagano, 1999), dreadlocks have become associated with twentieth century Jamaica and colonized peoples' rejection of Eurocentric values.

Home of hip-hop forefather DJ Kool Herc and much of New York's foreign-born Black population, Jamaica (or more broadly the Caribbean) has become historicized as hip-hop's cultural motherland (Chang, 2005). Hence, many of hip-hop's appeals to Jamaicanness – co-opting the Jamaican accent and/or patois dialect, sampling the aesthetics of reggae music, and in *our* cases, wearing dreadlocks – are performances of a more authentic Black identity individuals use (consciously and subconsciously) to position themselves closer to the motherland(s) (The Bronx and Africa) and further from the fatherland (America).

As a “pretty boy,” code-word for light-skinned with “good hair” (and soft), who skipped a couple hours of school every Friday to get his hair cut, the decision to lock my hair in college was undeniably political and psychological. Mr. Westland's reasons for locking his hair emerged from my questioning his motives for decorating his office with the likeness of Bob Marley:

I'm glad you asked me that. You should see how our visitors' knees almost buckle at the sight of that tapestry. [imitating White voice] ‘Oh my god! He's endorsing the consumption of marijuana in school.’ When my colleagues see a brotha with dreads they don't think ‘revolutionary’ or ‘Africa’ they think ‘pothead’. Or my students, they think ‘Lil Wayne’. And I'm thinking, I'm not Jamaican, or a pothead or a syrup-head. I'm a Black man who thinks for himself. That's what Marley represents; and that's the type of energy I'm trying to channel here.

For Mr. Westland, wearing dreadlocks, like conspicuously tattooing his body, and hanging posters of Bob Marley in his office, were performances of the “reverse colonization” (Chang, 2005) taking place in Mr. Westland's mind, body, and classroom.

Elsewhere in formal and informal interviews, Mr. Westland performed his expertise and in-group status by quoting specific lines from a vast hip-hop corpus. The

following exchange came in response to a question regarding why he decided to incorporate hip-hop into his curriculum and pedagogy:

Mr. Westland: I don't use hip-hop texts as much as I use our common language, our common experiences... I take it you vibe with Common?

Me: No doubt.

Mr. Westland: There's this jawn on I think *Be* called "It's Your World."

Me: Know it well. Never can go wrong with Common.

Mr. Westland: Never. There's a part where he's like, [rapping] "...we're the children of crack and rap, Blacks that lack, self-esteem yo we forgot to dream, on our Jeffersons y'all but we forgot the theme." He's right, "our generation never understood workin' for the man." But we damn sure know that cash rules everything around this motherfucker. So again, I use this language, these experiences, and sometimes these texts to talk about our dreams of movin' on up, and the tools and consequences of doing so.

In this passage we see a second instance where teachers who self-identified as hiphoppers invoked Common as the symbolic representation of authentic hip-hop cultural identity.

We take turns validating one another as I (a) confirm his presumptions that I do in fact "vibe with Common"; or in other words, subscribe to his notions of *real* music and Blackness, and (b) share he and his students' common language and experiences as "the children of crack and rap." He samples Common's lyrics to draw attention to the challenges "our generation" – the hip-hop generation – endures as we attempt to improve our individual social mobility while maintaining our racial and cultural authenticity in what are perceived to be White institutions. On this occasion, however, Mr. Westland uses *our* to conflate the experiences of Black and Brown people such as he, Common, and I born in the late 1970s/early 1980s, with that of his Black and Brown students who were born around 1994. While he and his students do share common origins as working-class racial minorities from the M.C., their *uncommon* generational positionalities demands further analysis of the political-economic contexts specific to the hip-hop culture and music of the 21st century. Mr. Westland's students have witnessed the historic

election of America's first Black president, in addition to the equally monumental conservative backlash against all things "public" (education, housing, health care, etc.). They have seen America's worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, a decade-long War on Terror, and technological innovations that have deregulated global finance and media (for better and for worse).

As far as our common language was concerned, Fagersten's (2008) study of discursive construction of hip-hop identities in hip-hop website message-boards argues that the use of "taboo terms" is a salient practice within the hip-hop community. *Real recognize real*, Mr. Westland did not hesitate in his use of the words *nigga* and *motherfucker*. Nor did he bother to ask before citing an artist, in this example, literally performing Jay-Z:

Mr. Westland: We as teachers are selling them a dream that education is the path to prosperity. And frankly, they like, [imitating Jay-Z's voice] "We don't believe you, you need more people" [shared laughter]. You know what I mean?

Me: No doubt!

Mr. Westland: I'm more people. *We're* different examples of prosperity. I'm evidence that every black man from [city] isn't a thug. You see them girls gettin' ready to pass out when you sit next to them [shared laughter]... Right? You're more evidence that every smart nigga isn't a square [more laughter].

My affirmation, "No doubt!" was not lip service; I knew exactly what he meant. "We don't believe you, you need more people" comes from Jay-Z's "diss track" "Takeover." The line was originally directed as an indictment of Prodigy from Mobb Deep who once was photographed in a tutu and ballet slippers before he "switched his demeanor" to the H.N.I.C. (Head Nigga In Charge). I also understood this was his way of questioning the authenticity of teachers, past and present. The form of Mr. Westland's responses positioned him next to me and inside hip-hop. At the same time, the content of his

responses positioned Mr. Westland next to his students, in effect, ‘othering’ teachers who do not understand who we are.

Despite not incorporating any hip-hop texts into his English/language arts curriculum, Mr. Westland provided major contributions to this study. After authoring instructional frameworks for Ms. Oxley, Ms. Brown, and Mr. Candler’s respective hip-hop based curricular approaches in Chapter 5; in Chapter 6 I use the *new school hipopper* to shift our focus from pedagogies *with* hip-hop and hip-hop as texts to pedagogies *of* hip-hop and hip-hop as methodology.

Summary

This chapter demonstrates the necessities and impossibilities (Hall, 1996) of how and why teachers politically and discursively construct and perform hip-hop cultural identities. Ms. Brown’s *old school* hip-hop cultural identity allowed her to maintain her psychological and cultural attachments to the ghetto and hip-hop, and at the same time separate herself from the politics of the ghetto and aesthetics of contemporary rap music. I used the term *no school hipopper* to describe the cultural identity of Ms. Oxley who was born in the hip-hop generation, yet erects cultural-deficit paradigms to disavow all psychological, political, and cultural connections to the ghetto and/or hip-hop culture. A performance of his political progressiveness, Mr. Candler positioned himself inside 1990s underground West Coast “Gangsta Rap” and contemporary “conscious” hip-hop as a means of distinguishing himself from the typical “suburban White kid” that indiscriminately consumes mainstream rap music. However, in constructing hip-hop as a quintessentially Black cultural and political space the *out-of-school hipopper* positions

himself as an authentic, as well as voyeuristic ‘other’. Lastly, Mr. Westland, a *new school hiphopper*, constructs hip-hop as a “youthful identity” shared by he, his Black and Latino students, and I. Although the hybrid of racial, cultural, political, and generational forces swirling in and around his classroom and hip-hop culture make notions of a singular, collective identity impossible, this was necessary as Mr. Westland negotiated his becoming as a Black man of the hip-hop generation teaching in public schools. He performed his cultural authenticity both through the form and content of his verbal discourses – what I called “real talk” (speaking forthright, quoting rap lyrics, using taboo terms) – as well as non-verbal hip-hop cultural practices such as wearing dreadlocks and exposing his tattoos. Later, in Chapter 6 I delve deeper into the social-action curricular approaches that set him apart from ‘other’ teachers in the building and in the cohort.

Epitomized by Jay-Z and the contradiction that is “Che Guevara with bling on,” these vignettes offer insight into the complexities of hip-hop cultural politics. The data indicates that hip-hop cultural identities – whether as beings or as becomings – are far from monolithic and not always progressive. And in the cases of the older Black females and White male teachers in the cohort, teachers’ curricular approaches to using hip-hop as literary, poetic, and political texts are not always empowering either.

CHAPTER FIVE
DROPPIN' KNOWLEDGE OR DEPOSITING THE REAL?:
APPROACHES TO HIP-HOP BASED CURRICULAR INTERVENTIONS

“Typically, HHBE educators choose texts that they deem politically, intellectually, or culturally sophisticated and relevant. While appropriate, such moves often lead to the development of curricula that respond to the interests, experiences, and generational orientation of the teacher rather than student. In doing so, HHBE contexts not only risk becoming less “culturally relevant,” they can also replicate the very structures of elitism that HHBE contexts aim to problematize and ultimately dismantle.” – Marc Lamont Hill *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life* (p. 39)

This dissertation argues that the hip-hop pedagogies evidenced in the cohort were diverse and reflected different beliefs about hip-hop, pedagogy, and the politics of education.

Using Banks’ (2010) model for integrating multicultural content as a guiding analytic framework, this chapter details the various ways that the teachers in this study integrate hip-hop texts into their English/language arts curriculum. This chapter also highlights the close relationship between teachers’ respective curricular approaches and their respective hip-hop cultural identities.

Approaches to Hip-hop Based Curricular Interventions

Earlier in Chapter 2, I situated HHBE as a strand of critical multicultural teacher education and hip-hop pedagogy as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy. Banks (2010) identifies four approaches to integrating multicultural content – contributions, additive, transformative, and social action – that I use to characterize the different levels to which members of the cohort incorporated hip-hop texts into their English/language arts curriculum.

The contributions approach, the lowest of the four levels, “is characterized by the insertion of ethnic heroes/heroines and discrete cultural artifacts into the curriculum,

selected using criteria similar to those used to select mainstream heroes/heroines and cultural artifacts” (Banks, 2010, p. 232). An example of a contributions approach would be reading about Cesar Chavez during National Hispanic Heritage Month. The most common approach, the additive approach, describes “the addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purposes, and characteristics” (Banks, 2010, p. 235). For example, examining the perspective of Latin Americans in a unit on “The Boom” of the 1960s. In contrast, the transformative approach “changes the basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view” (Banks, 2010, p. 237). A transformative approach to a unit on the Boom might focus on questions of America’s unofficial official language, and how Latino/a perspectives have not only redefined the English language, but what it means to be American. The highest level is the social action approach where the goals are “to educate students for social criticism and social change and to teach them decision-making skills” (Banks, 2010, p. 239). In a social action unit on the Boom, students would use their knowledge of social issues to create essays, letters, presentations, and/or performances designed to heighten the consciousness of others, whether fellow students, members of the community, even elected officials.

Contributions Approaches

Conscious that her views of hip-hop were “a bit, shall we say, jaded,” Ms. Oxley’s *no school* hip-hop cultural identity inhibited her ability to engage in anything more than contributions and additive hip-hop-based curricular approaches. Despite being

highly critical of the ways conservative politics and policies were negatively impacting notions of teaching and learning in our formal and informal interviews, she held traditional, technocratic beliefs about her role, purpose, and function as an educator. As such, Ms. Oxley did not integrate hip-hop texts into her curriculum because “Tupac’s not on the [state standardized test].” Viewing hip-hop culture and her students as culturally deficient, the *no school hiphopper* did not see the intellectual merits of using hip-hop to accomplish her pragmatic academic and socio-cultural objectives. She did, however, add an *extra* guiding question to an *extra* unit on the Harlem Renaissance, cynically examining hip-hop’s contributions to Black culture and contemporary American Literature.

“I am a teacher of English.” Ms. Oxley defined her purpose as an educator in technocratic terms. “I am a teacher of English,” she said. “A public servant really; like a policeman or mailman. That’s it! I deliver kids that can read, write, and think... hopefully.” Serving the public entailed improving students’ functional literacies. In our introductory meeting, it was my mentioning of the word *theory*, specifically my descriptions of the holistic goals of culturally relevant pedagogy that finally drew her attention away from her grading:

Ms. Oxley: What y’all [teacher educators] doin’ over there [at Temple and teacher education in general]? You think a theory written in the Tower can teach someone how to do what we do in the trenches?

Me: That’s exactly why I’m here. To bring the trenches to the Tower!

Ms. Oxley: As far as I’m concerned, all that culture stuff is a foot on their neck. Work ethic fixed our problems. This is America; you gotta flow with the majority, that’s just the way it is.

Ms. Oxley positioned herself as far from the academy as she did from hip-hop. She believed that teacher education should be “more like med school than law school,”

emphasizing the importance of hands-on training, and implying that smarter teachers do not necessarily possess the common sense or cultural capital to handle the social demands of teaching effectively in Riverfront. Ms. Oxley's critique of "the (Ivory) Tower" expresses her dissatisfaction with the Eurocentric epistemologies of teacher education. Yet, she contradicts herself in the same breath, as her *no school* hip-hop cultural identity made her equally, if not more, skeptical of hip-hop's epistemological value in improving educational theory and practice.

Conceding to the realities of America's Eurocentrism, Ms. Oxley's notions of culturally relevant pedagogy entailed teaching Black and Latino/a students "high" culture. Part of her public service as a teacher and *no school hiphopper* was to instill her culturally deficient students with the work ethic and content-knowledge to "flow with the majority." This meant closely adhering to the curriculum prescribed by the RSD. It also meant setting aside her political beliefs in the name of objectivity:

Me: I've seen a lot of discussion this semester, a lot work, on this idea of the American Dream. What were your motivations for this unit?

Ms. Oxley: It was in the curriculum. The overarching theme of American Literature is the American Dream. We look at it through the 5 different literary movements: Puritanism, Rationalism, Romanticism, Realism and Modernism. And with your help we're movin' from Modernism to Contemporary. We're movin' baby! What was it again? Oh yeah, the American Dream... it all relates to this thing called the American Dream, which is a bunch of bullshit. I don't tell the kids that, of course.

Me: Why not?

Ms. Oxley: Oh, because that would reflect my own personal political beliefs and you're not supposed to do that. You're supposed to present both sides of an issue with the goal being that they'll start to draw their own conclusions, and that they'll open their eyes a little wider and see a little bit more because they're so cloistered.

Me: Why is it important to keep your political bias out of the classroom?

Ms. Oxley: 'Cause you have to. That's not fair. I'm not trying to indoctrinate a kid to think like I think. They have to draw their own conclusions. I want them to be thinking individuals, that's my goal. That when they read something they'll

think about it before they believe it. If they see something on TV or in the hood they'll think about it before they do it. They don't think...

Despite believing that the American Dream and No Child Left Behind were “bullshit,” she would later say: “They don't pay me to teach the politics of No Child Left Behind.” Reflective of her technocratic beliefs about teaching, her job was to teach American Literature and produce “thinking individuals” – nothing more. From Ms. Oxley's perspective as a *no school hipopper*, the dangers within the politics and psychology of hip-hop culture (e.g. ‘F’ the police; ‘F’ everybody) were more clear and present than the dangers of the politics and psychology of America and/or NCLB.

Hip-hop as American Literature. The Harlem Renaissance, though marginalized as “Contemporary,” *was* American Literature. Based solely on my observations of Ms. Oxley's curricular selections, African-Americans did not contribute to American Literature until this literary, cultural, and political movement of the 1920s. She looked forward to “getting to [the Harlem Renaissance] this year,” as the unit was often the first sacrificed in the name of test preparation.

Ms. Oxley's integration of hip-hop, or any multicultural texts for that matter, was additive at best. Beyond token uses such as playing “The Perfect Beat” by Afrika Bambaataa, or “I Ain't No Joke” by Eric B. & Rakim occasionally during pre-class activities (PCAs), Ms. Oxley's hip-hop based curricular approaches consisted of supplementing the Harlem Renaissance unit's guiding questions (prescribed by the textbook) to include a fourth question:

1. What was life like for African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance?
2. How were issues of race addressed?
3. What contributions were made to American art and culture?
4. *How does hip-hop compare and contrast with the Harlem Renaissance historically, politically, and culturally?*

When I asked what songs she used in the past, she assumed a defensive, anti-intellectual posture, saying, “We just talked about it as it came up. That’s what effective teachers do: make connections to their real lives.” I took this as both an admission to and deflection from her *unscientific* use of hip-hop.

One of Ms. Oxley’s former students who was now studying to be teacher and observing her once a week characterized her teaching persona as having a “hard edge.” In Ms. Oxley’s words, “I’m not like a femmy-femme, come-here-and-give-me-a hug kind of teacher.” If her job and her students called for her to serve as an administrator during summer school, helping with SAT preparation one Saturday a month, or advising the Yearbook Club’s weekly meetings – which it did – she wholeheartedly obliged. Then again, she was ardent in her beliefs that that was as far as her teacher-student relationships went.

With time and familiarity, however, I gained greater access to Ms. Oxley’s softer, more humble side. She offered these reflections in our exit interview:

I guess I should thank you for yet another reminder that I’m old and that I need to keep learning. Part of me thinks it’s kinda sad; probably the part of me that’s getting old, but Tupac *is* American Literature. I can’t believe I just said that... That’s my whole thing now, I’m just trying to put myself in new situations where I don’t know too much about something, and I have to learn something new, it really makes me appreciate how they [students] feel sometimes. I don’t ask that question anymore, “Well why don’t you know?” [speaking as student] “Because I don’t. And that’s why you’re here, to teach me.” And that’s why *you’re* [me] here, to teach me... More and more, if you don’t have empathy, if you cannot connect with them, or understand something about them, how can you expect to teach them anything? You can’t! And that’s why we don’t see any of *your* students [White suburban females] around here. They might want to be a teacher, they might know some literature, but they don’t have a clue of what it takes to truly be effective.

Ms. Oxley was well aware of her biases toward hip-hop, the importance to “empathize” or identify with students, and the need to learn new curricular approaches and pedagogical strategies to reconcile the two. Our task became reconstituting the unit in a way where hip-hop culture (and students’ experiences in Riverfront) was on equal standing with American Literature (and the “New Negroes’ experiences in Harlem”); shifting hip-hop from the object of discussion to the subject of inquiry. However, whether speaking of the words or worlds of hip-hop, no teacher can be expected to teach what he or she does not know (Freire, 1998).

Harlem Renaissance Renaissance? (Featuring Tupac and Nas). Learning Objectives. Ms. Oxley invited me to assist her in the planning and delivery of the Harlem Renaissance unit. In the first of our lesson planning meetings she said, “This time I want to start with what they know (hip-hop) and work back.” My participation entailed serving in two capacities. Ms. Oxley asked me to develop a PowerPoint presentation that introduced students to (a) important figures such as DuBois, Garvey and Van der Zee, (b) the Harlem Renaissance’s themes of self-realization, Black Nationalism, and “capturing the tragedy and happiness in life,” and (c) the historical, political, and cultural origins of hip-hop. She cited three reasons for the PowerPoint. First, she wanted me to model what an effective presentation (slide design and communication skills) looked and sounded like. Second, Ms. Oxley wanted to “expose them to college rigor.” She asked me to conduct the class in the same manner and with the same vocabulary that I would with my undergraduate students. Third, she was “in the same boat as the students” in terms of her historical knowledge of hip-hop’s structural and cultural origins and wanted the knowledge and instructional resources for her own benefit.

I also helped design the unit's second lesson where students would identify and interrogate themes from the Harlem Renaissance as expressed in rap music and hip-hop culture. I suggested adding two texts, "Changes" (1998) by Tupac Shakur and "N.I.G.G.E.R. (Slave and Master)" (2008) by Nas, to the unit curriculum. I selected these specific texts because of their lyrical content related to the themes of self-realization and "capturing the tragedy and happiness in life." Additionally, the artists themselves represent two different brands of contemporary Black Nationalism – Tupac, being the son of a Black Panther, and Nas, who proffers a more Afrocentric, yet similarly incoherent perspective.

As I fully expected, Ms. Oxley immediately became fixated on the six capitalized letters comprising the second title. "My that's an ugly word," she said. "You couldn't come up with anything better than this?"

Reminding her not to judge a book by its cover, or in this case a rap by its title, we continued reading together, noting Nas' references to self-realization, Black Nationalism, and "capturing the tragedy and happiness in life."

They say we N-I double G-E-R, we are
Much more, still we choose to ignore
The obvious, man this history don't acknowledge us
We were scholars long before colleges
They say we N-I double G-E-R, we are
Much more, but still we choose to ignore
The obvious, we are the slave and the master
What you lookin for? You the question and the answer

[Verse 1]

We trust no black leaders, use the stove to heat us
Powdered eggs and government cheeses
The calendars with Martin, JFK and Jesus
Gotta be fresh to go to school with fly sneakers
Schools with outdated books, we are the forgotten
Summers, coolin off by the fire hydrant

Yeah I'm from the ghetto
Where old black women talk about their sugar level - it's not unusual
To see photos of dead homie's funerals
Aluminum foil on TV antennas
Little TV sit on top the big TV, eating TV dinners
Girls dye their hair with Kool-Aid
They gave us lemons, we made lemonade
But this nigger's paid, ancestry of slaves
Descendant of kings, it's necessary I - bling
Put rims on everything, wear Timbs on every scene

Upon walking her through each of the three 16-bar verses line-by-line, Ms.

Brown's attention shifted away from the provocative title and toward comprehending the words she was reading. While I made sure to highlight examples of the themes in all of the verses in both songs, she found Nas' complex rhyme scheme to be a harder read than Tupac's narrative. In the second verse, for example, she had trouble deciphering the simile: "the ones bringin us the cake be the snakes like the New Jack City wedding scene." In the movie, *New Jack City* (1991), the wedding of Nino Brown (played by Wesley Snipes), the hip-hop generation's Tony Montana, was ambushed by enemies disguised as caterers. In this instance, cake signifies money as Nas accuses America, not to mention elements of the Black community (himself included), of being snakes, double-crossing Black people. This was arguably Nas' most creative (and complicated) articulation of the song's primary theme. I do not know if Ms. Oxley exhaled or "ah-ha-ed," but she took comfort in realizing that (a) Nas was not using the N-word out of sheer ignorance, and (b) he was not solely blaming "the man," but holding the Black/hip-hop community accountable for its self-destructive behaviors as well.

Considering Ms. Brown's unfamiliarity with reading these texts, I understood her apprehensions about relinquishing her authority as *the* literature expert in the room. We designed the lesson in a way that she would not have to master every line. She would,

however, have to depend on students' expertise in reading rap songs and living the tragedy and happiness of life in Riverfront.

Drawn from my observations and fieldnotes I submit this instructional framework for how Ms. Brown activated prior knowledge, introduced new material, engaged students in guided and independent practice, and assessed learning.

Activate Prior Knowledge. Waiting for students on the chalkboard as they came in, the PCA asked students to review the prior day's lecture notes and *explain the themes of the Harlem Renaissance in your own words to a neighbor*. As the chatter seemed to rise and stray from the topic at hand, Ms. Brown brought the class together and solicited responses. She wrote *self-realization* on the board as she asked the leading question: "What self(s) [emphasizing the plural] are we realizing?"

From a smattering of voices Ms. Oxley pulled out *racial* and *cultural* and added them to the board. With her back still to the students she praised their enthusiasm while pleading for their cooperation. With her Latino/a students in mind Ms. Oxley sought to broaden their definition of the second theme, reframing *Black Nationalism* as (political, racial, cultural, economic, religious) *self-determination*. For time's sake, she glossed over the third theme as "self-explanatory."

Introducing New Material. Ms. Oxley framed the lesson, albeit with an air of skepticism, as a continuation of my introductory lecture. She cautioned students not to get too excited, for she was "only using Tupac and Nas as a bridge to the poetry and literature of the Harlem Renaissance."

Guided Practice. Ms. Oxley did not acknowledge Nas' song by its official title. Instead, she led a class reading and discussion of the chorus and first verse of "Slave and

Master” for guided practice. I distributed printed copies of the song lyrics to their “lit circles” (5 groups) as she instructed students to annotate the document where they see/hear examples of self-realization, self-determination, and tragedy/happiness. After playing the song once in its entirety from my laptop, she asked students to hold their comments until they listened to the verse a second time.

Allen and Jasmine, pointing to the line “we are much more,” immediately identified the chorus as being built around the theme of self-realization. Ms. Brown complimented them and probed further, “What self(s) is he trying to teach us about?”

Allen responded, “He’s trying to say we are much more than... can I say it? Niggers. He’s saying we’re the descendants of kings.”

Hassan, who stayed after class on Wednesday to ask me about Elijah Muhammed’s role in the Harlem Renaissance, talked about the first line of the verse and how the Black community has come so far not to trust any politicians, even the *real* ones in the Nation of Islam. Ms. Oxley seconded his point, noting the failures of local Black politicians in post-Civil Rights Era America.

When asked about examples of tragedy and happiness described by Nas, Cassandra commented on how common violence is in her community. Allen spoke about how much fun he had as a kid seeing water spraying from fire hydrants on hot summer days. He also talked about the pride that came with getting older and being able to do the same for his little sister and cousins.

The only content-related question came from Star, who queried, “People really put kool-aid in their hair?” After Star’s classmates filled her in on the techniques, Ms. Oxley embarked on her own narrative of self-realization:

Ms. Oxley: Ladies, have you ever dogged another sister's hair that wasn't pressed to your standards [confirming "hell yeahs," smiles and laughs]. Or have you ever thought about not coming to school when your hair's not done because you're worried about what folks might say [more confirmations]?

Lorraine: I was in the chair til like 2:30 Sunday night (Monday morning) [patting her wavy, blonde weave with pride and a sense of accomplishment].

Ms. Oxley: The question is *why*?

Ronneda: 'Cause you can't go out the house lookin' a mess.

Ms. Oxley: And what does lookin' a mess mean?

Various students: A nappy head.

Ms. Oxley: This is what DuBois calls "self-hatred"... Those aren't *your* standards! Your hair ain't blonde! Your hair ain't straight like that! Yet, we have been taught, through the media and through loved ones that our "natural" self is ugly, lookin' a mess.

What would you say if a white girl walked into class with a fro or a white boy with braids [students bust out in laughter]. Absolutely ridiculous, right? What do you think DuBois or Garvey would say at the sight of your prom [more laughter including me, referring the extravagant hairstyles common to urban schools]? Or that you were late for school because you were up all night getting tracks put in? We're cracking up but *this* is self-realization and Nas' point, Dr. Hall correct me if I'm wrong. "You the question and the answer!" When you or any of us are sitting in that chair you're not thinking, "Man, I want to be white today." But what are you thinking?

Myra: [Hesitatingly] I don't want to look Black today.

Ms. Oxley: Say that again.

Myra: I don't want to look Black today.

On our way to the parking lot after class, Ms. Oxley said to me, "Did you see the look on their faces when we were talking about "good hair"? It's sidebars like that where the learning happens." Going in to the lesson, I did not think Ms. Oxley would be able to resist the temptation to avail her politics about the N-word. Although Ms. Oxley did not believe it was her job to teach the politics of NCLB, she did see it as her job to teach her students, especially Black females, what was wrong with their politics. The "kool-aid" line refers to the creative ways poor Black people "make lemonade," or adapt to the social conditions of the ghetto. Ms. Oxley, who wore dreadlocks, spun the conversation into an indictment of Black female identity politics and the "self-hatred" performed by Black women. Ms. Oxley claimed that if her students knew their true historical, racial,

and cultural “selves” (like she did) then they would despise themselves as “ghetto” or “niggers.” Ms. Oxley was correct – this was Nas’ point. However, her pronouncements, “Those aren’t your standards! Your hair ain’t blonde! Your hair ain’t straight like that!” were couched in a tone of disdain that disproportionately blamed the victim, inspiring more eye-rolling than empowerment.

Independent Practice. As a transition to independent practice, Ms. Oxley stressed that this was “her reading” and that she was curious to see their interpretations. At this point she introduced “Changes,” giving me the cue to press play. Some students began singing along upon recognizing the song. Immediately, Ms. Oxley asked me to stop the music and reminded them: “I know y’all forget this all the time, but the choir room is two floors down!” While Ms. Oxley spoke the words with the specific intent of quieting the room, this is a prime example of the ways the *no-school hipopper* unconsciously drew lines of distinction that positioned her students, the creative arts, and social behaviors accepted in those spaces literally and figuratively beneath her, the language arts, and the interactional styles valued in *real* classrooms where White, middle-class cultural norms are privileged. When the song was done, a member of each lit circle drew a number corresponding to the particular verse they would be annotating. Students were then given 15 minutes to identify and discuss examples of self-realization, self-determination, and tragedy/happiness.

Ms. Oxley’s edge was much softer when working with students individually or in small groups. Despite every functioning seat being filled she slalomed through the groups, making sure to acknowledge anyone that she had not personally greeted on the way in. Ms. Oxley was known for “blowing up spots,” humorously broadcasting, for

example, Hassan's audacity for trying to sneak into class late without a pass. Other times, like the one I describe below, she intentionally made private conversations public to validate questions and/or answers students may not have had the confidence to voice themselves.

I overheard Kimberly ask Ms. Oxley, "Who is Huey?"

"You don't know Huey P. Newton? Founder of the Black Panther Party?" she stated loud enough to draw the attention of the rest of the class. "That's definitely self-realization!"

Ms. Oxley kneeled down next to Kimberly, quietly thanked her for the question, and asked if she could depend on her to share a few facts about Huey and the Panthers with her classmates tomorrow.

Assessments of Learning. Learning would be informally assessed as at least one student from each group would be responsible for sharing their interpretations during tomorrow's PCA. Learning would be formally assessed through a written homework assignment due the next day. Students were responsible for composing a 3-paragraph expository essay addressing each of these questions: *What is life like for Black and Latino/a youth in contemporary urban America? How does the artist address issues of race? What positive or negative contributions has hip-hop made to American art and culture?*

As promised, Ms. Oxley sought students' responses prior to transitioning to "real poetry" like "Dream Variation" by Langston Hughes.

Cristian spoke to the tragedy and happiness noted in Nas' second verse: "We didn't find a lot of examples of self-realization and self-determination in this verse. In my

paper I talked about how the only way for him to see his American Dream was to sell coke.”

“That most certainly is a tragedy,” replied Ms. Oxley.

Hassan said, “I was feelin the line ‘anytime we mention our condition, our history or existence, they callin it reverse racism.’ It’s like White people get all nervous or defensive when we talk about our experiences in this country. Even Black folk be sayin ‘quit preachin’” when you remind them that their purpose is more than the corner.”

Moving to the first verse of “Changes,” Ms. Oxley called on Kimberley who cited Wikipedia as she helped her classmates realize who Huey P. Newton was.

“What has changed and what hasn’t according to the second verse?” Ms. Oxley inquired.

Jasmine said, “Obviously, we do have a Black President. What hasn’t changed? We still not chillin. And we still smokin crack.

Zeke added, “And the pen[itentiary] is still packed with Blacks!”

Rakim was the spokesperson for Group 6, “I asked my dad and he said that Pac was talking about the first war in the Middle East.”

“That is correct,” affirmed Ms. Oxley. “I know somebody on the Internet saw Tupac in the mall last weekend but he was killed long before the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Rakim continued, “It seems like the government is more interested in protecting people in Iraq than the people suffering right here. Like my dad said, I ain’t worried about no Iraqis, I’m scared of po-po!”

“Now hold on a minute. If you, not *you*, you know what I mean... If Pac didn't have drugs on him then the police wouldn't bother him, right? Right?”

Aside from her earlier noted narrative on self-hatred and remarks on Tupac's (or drug dealers') lack of individual responsibility, Ms. Oxley's did her best not to infringe on students' readings of the texts or discredit their experiences with the tragedy and happiness associated with living in Riverfront. The day after students presented their cumulative projects at “The Renaissance Fair,” Ms. Oxley posed the question: *What do you see as the pros and cons of teachers using hip-hop in the classroom?*

Shareen: Most teachers don't respect hip-hop or *our* experiences. It just felt like I learned more about my history and how far we've gotten away from it. I told my mama and auntie about when we talked about self-hatred and perms and they didn't know what to say!

Rakim: After the first lecture or presentation, I was like I *have* to do my homework. I mean how you gon' be Black or from the hood and *not* do your homework on Langston Hughes or Tupac?

Ms. Oxley: You're supposed to do your homework everyday!

Rakim: I guess you should use hip-hop everyday!... You asked!

Ms. Oxley: That I did. No, I definitely heard a few more voices in class and definitely saw improvements in the overall quality and content of the final projects. But in terms of some of the other writing assignments I think DuBois would be disappointed. What about cons?

Joel: At first I thought he (me) was going to be teaching us how to rap, and I don't know if that belongs in school, but for me it was cool to see.

Based on students' responses, Ms. Oxley accomplished her goals. Ms. Oxley's narrative on self-hatred did have transformative affects on Shareen as she began to question her history, her education, and her cultural practices. From Rakim and Joel we see the possibilities of hip-hop texts being used to improve student motivation. We also see that while Ms. Oxley acknowledges the increased motivation and improved projects, she did not give Rakim's suggestion that she “should use hip-hop everyday” much thought.

Summary. Ms. Oxley’s goal was not to transform her American Literature curriculum, but rather use rap music as a “hook” to increase her culturally-deficient students’ participation in and identification with *real* American Literature and Black culture exemplified by the Harlem Renaissance. Students did benefit from seeing Nas and Tupac inserted into the curriculum as cultural heroes alongside the likes of Hughes and DuBois. However, Ms. Oxley’s conservative *no school* hip-hop cultural identity informed her technocratic beliefs about teaching and learning (and contributions curricular approaches) that dissuaded her from engaging in overtly political pedagogies *about* hip-hop that could have potentially furthered students’ cultural competencies (understandings of the incongruencies of Black Nationalism in hip-hop) and critical consciousness (structural inequalities that contribute to the disproportionate tragedies experienced by her students).

Additive Approaches

As noted in Chapter 3, and in stark contrast from 4A, teachers at PHS enjoyed virtual curricular and pedagogical autonomy. Although Ms. Brown articulated beliefs about teaching and learning and curricular approaches to hip-hop as poetry that were transformative, her nostalgic *old school* hip-hop cultural identity produced pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop that were ultimately additive in the ways they replicated “the very structures of elitism that HHBE contexts aim to problematize and ultimately dismantle” (Hill, 2009, p. 39).

“Agent of Change.” Ms. Brown did not live in Riverfront, but she was committed to the community. In addition to duties at PHS, she taught adult education

courses that kept her in Riverfront past 8 pm three days a week. As evidence of her commitment, she confided in me that her obligations to Riverfront and her students, or more poignantly, the inability of her ex-husband to understand why she could not “just teach in the suburbs,” were factors that contributed to their marriage ending in divorce.

To the interview question: *What is your purpose as a public school teacher?* Ms. Brown replied, “I see my purpose as being an agent of change. It is my job to influence students to bring about change in their own communities, homes, and minds.” Ms. Brown’s transformative beliefs about teaching and learning were not grounded in theory or cultural-deficit paradigms. They grew out of her and her students’ shared “reality” teaching and learning in the M.C.:

My reality is that I have to approach my teaching, my students, as if they’re never gonna get to college. I can’t take for granted that they’ll find themselves in college like we did because they gotta find college first. As a school we do all we can do to help them find college even if it means dragging them. I have to; I try to, create that higher education environment, that change, right here right now. I’m not gonna lie, most of them don’t have the basic skills to read Plato. But if we can use Kanye, Common, whoever to have a similar philosophical discussion about our existence that they can apply to their real lives I think I’m accomplishing my goals as a teacher.

Ms. Brown taught with a sense of urgency to aid students in acquiring the functional, as well as critical literacies to find themselves (a) on a college campus, and (b) culturally.

Ms. Brown held the highest expectations of herself and her students. She spoke as if all her students gaining admittance to college was a given. Cognizant of her students’ relatively low basic skills, she directly instructed students in writing strategies that would help them navigate the most conspicuous obstacles in that path: the state standardized test and college application essay.

In their reality, graduation from high school and admittance to college had less to do with intellectual capacity, test-taking skills, or personal responsibility as it did with the “objective conditions” (Freire, 1985) associated with living in Riverfront. Parents who could not or did not file the tax returns required if applying for federal financial aid because they “work under the table.” Former wards of the state now emancipated whom work to live, or students responsible for caring for younger siblings or ailing elders.

Equally, if not more important than admittance to college was her goal of fostering a “higher education environment” where students questioned their existence in an effort to “find themselves.” This is the clearest window into how Ms. Brown’s *old school* hip-hop cultural identity influenced her beliefs about teaching and curricular approaches. The idea that her job is to help students “find themselves,” reminds me of Ms. Oxley, as she implies that her students do not know who they are. However, in contrast to Ms. Oxley, this was more of an indictment of urban public *miseducation*, specifically non-culturally relevant K-12 curriculum and pedagogy, than her students’ values. Unlike Ms. Brown and I (and to little fault of their own), Ms. Oxley’s students might not be afforded the privilege of attending college where Black faces and perspectives are presumably better represented. As an *old school hiphopper* and spoken-word poet who understood the realities of the ghetto (and America), *real* hip-hop, that is rap music meeting certain lyrical, generational, and political benchmarks (a la Kanye West and Common), was poetry worthy of critical literary and cultural analysis.

In response to her previously noted desires to “provide some balance” to the identities expressed in contemporary rap music, I asked Ms. Brown to speak more about her motivations for incorporating hip-hop into her curriculum and pedagogy:

Ms. Brown: When I went to college I went to [Catholic liberal arts college] and I took classes at [Ivy League University] in the summer. I met a friend there, and he had like this intimate connection to hip-hop. I mean a TRUE hip-hop head.

Me: And for those who may not know, what is a “hip-hop head”?

Ms. Brown: A hip-hop head is someone who lives, breathes, sleeps hip-hop. That’s my point. Hip-hop was so much more than music to him. I think that’s what outsiders will never get. Not only could he break down the figurative language that made my head spin, he could tell me the jazz sample in the background. He could explain Nas’ random reference to Garvey or Mumia. I mean this guy went to [Ivy League University] so he was obviously intelligent, but I know that it was hip-hop where he got his intro to sociology. It was hip-hop where he got his nightly news. I think the philosophy behind many of the stories of hip-hop music is trying to say are directly related to what the students are going through. So it is a way in, and it’s a way to capture their attention and interests. We can talk about a lot of themes through hip-hop, we can talk about almost anything through hip-hop where they’re going to be captivated and where I can open their mind to different views, different texts, different approaches to learning that they have never even thought about.

Ms. Brown positions herself as ‘other’ in comparison to “hip-hop heads” like her friend and me. She then positions herself as ‘insider’ in comparison to the White teachers she casts as ‘outsiders’ for not appreciating the intellectual merits of hip-hop culture and music. From these positionalities Ms. Brown sees old school hip-hop as more than just a hook. It is the basis from which all teaching and learning – academic (figurative language) and/or socio-cultural (“sociology”) – should be scaffolded.

Hip-hop as Poetry. I did find discrepancies between the transformative beliefs expressed by Ms. Brown and the actions taken. In our entry interview, Ms. Brown’s described prior hip-hop based curricular interventions with Kanye West’s trilogy: *College Dropout, Late Registration, and Graduation*. While I did not witness this firsthand, clearly these actions were informed by her *old school* hip-hop cultural identity and outrage at what she perceived to be anti-educationally-themed rap music:

Okay. Don’t get me wrong, I love Kanye. But for real Kanye? How can you be the son of a college professor and then drop an album called College Dropout? He got a college education everyday at the dinner table. I don’t know if you’ve

noticed but there aren't many college-educated mothers or dinner tables for that matter in [city name]. So I decided that we'd analyze his use of this theme to shape his first, what, three albums? I broke them down in three groups, assigned each group an album, and gave them each a list of the song titles for that album. Each individual had to pick a song and explain how it related to the larger theme of the album. To get them to practice their presentations I had each group construct a PowerPoint with concept maps of the positive and negative messages he sends to the 'hood. Part of him is making a great point, right? We as Black people have not been able to depend on schools and teachers to teach us what we need to know. I know this; it's why I chose this profession. What's worse, and I think all of America is learning what we've known for some time now: a college diploma no longer guarantees you a job in today's economy. You explain to kids in the projects why it makes sense to take \$50,000 in loans to get a job that pays less than 50. Trust me, they can do this math. We also discussed what this says about hip-hop, what it says about us, that we see being college educated as not being real. This is what they hear, see, and live all day long. They were born in like '92-'93, they don't know a world without hip-hop. And to be honest with you, they don't know a world where going to school pays off either. If anything is going to change in our schools and community it is going to have to be through analyzing and changing hip-hop culture.

I include this passage in its entirety for a number of reasons. First, we learn of the *science* of Ms. Brown's curricular approaches to using hip-hop as poetry in concert with project-based assessments to improve students' academic achievements (analyzing and interpreting themes; constructing concept maps), cultural competencies (anti-intellectualism in hip-hop culture), and critical consciousness ("will school pay off?"). Secondly, her narrative previews her *art*, or the pedagogies of hip-hop I would observe in her classroom. Symptomatic of her desires to restore hip-hop to its nostalgic, *old school* origins, Ms. Brown's reading of Kanye was too literal. I saw him making a more nuanced, introspective critique of the middle-class mantra put forth by Ms. Brown and Mrs. West (and Mrs. Hall) that encourages taking the "safe route" and deters budding geniuses from chasing their dreams. I found this striking considering that Ms. Brown acknowledges that the safe route has been rather hostile for the generations of Black and Brown people whose academic and/or socio-cultural needs have gone unmet by public

schools. She acknowledges hip-hop's almost prophetic warnings that increased educational attainment does not necessarily lead to increased social mobility in today's urban political-economies. Furthermore, she acknowledges that her students perceive this and other fallacies (e.g. delayed gratification) propagated in school, but lack the space and opportunity to deconstruct the equally dangerous fallacies (e.g. education is weakness) prevalent in contemporary hip-hop culture and music.

In the next section I provide instructional frameworks that depict the connections between Ms. Oxley's *old school* hip-hop cultural identity and her pedagogies *with* and *about* the poetry of Tupac Shakur.

“Wonder Why They Call You... (Featuring Tupac)”. I was running a few minutes late on this spring morning due to the heavy rains and flooded roads leading to PHS. Unsuspectingly, I walked into class as Ms. Brown was breathing fire in the direction of JoJo, Kyree, Sam, and Kellen, all sulking on the couch:

This is what's wrong with us... apathetic, ignorant Black men. Y'all supposed to be our leaders and role models and look at y'all. You can't even stand up straight!

Watching this as it unfolded, I was immediately taken aback and felt Ms. Brown was going too far. Later, I learned this barrage was sparked by the boys' refusal to informally present the goals of their quarterly projects.

As volumes and emotions flared I knew it was only a matter of time until Ms. Brown or the boys would seek backup:

Kellen: You see how she goin' in right?

Ms. Brown: Yes I am goin in! Mr. Bernard, am I trippin?''

Before I had to figure a way to please both constituencies, Kellen politely interjected and spoke on his own behalf:

I understand there are consequences for my actions and that y'all want us to have good work ethic and all. But Ms. Brown be talking to us like we *all* Black men or something. I'm not no babydaddy! I don't sell dope! They [pointing to girls] ain't do their homework either.

Kellen's words conjured up those of Jay-Z and the song, "So Ambitious" (2009).

In a "letter" to all his doubters, especially former teachers, he states: "I'm different, I can't base what I'm gonna be off of what everybody isn't." This was the most noteworthy example of when Ms. Brown's politics put a strain on teacher-student relations. It was more than appropriate for Ms. Brown to question the high rate of lethargy demonstrated in the early mornings and/or low rates of homework completion. Unfortunately, her isolation of the boys and questioning of their manhood and intelligence was neither artful, nor constructive. Even more troubling, the patriarchal language she used to actualize her vision of the "best of our blackness" (Dyson, 2007) seemed to reinforce females' subordinate position in class and the community.

Learning Objectives. Ms. Brown called me during Spring Break to discuss the firestorm that took place the previous week. Ms. Brown humbly acknowledged the truth in Kellen's claim about the girls not doing their homework, her poor choice of words, and letting her emotions get the best of her. She was particularly frustrated because her attempts to, in her words, "drop knowledge," were received by the boys as nagging. When we sat down at a local dining establishment near her home she had a couple ideas on where to go from here. Generally speaking, she wanted to use "the poetry of Tupac Shakur" to try to have a more constructive conversation on "What it means to be a (Black) man or a woman." She revealed her underlying socio-cultural objectives in the form of a rhetorical question: "If hip-hop is the voice of the 'hood, why are females, the foundation of our community, seen so much more than they are heard?" In terms of

academic achievements, her primary objective was for students to compose expository essays formatted according to state-standardized testing protocols based on their readings and discussions of the poems.

Ms. Brown came to the table with two texts in mind: “Dear Mama” and “Wonda Why They Call U Bitch” by Tupac Shakur. When I asked why she chose these particular songs, her first response was that she was familiar and comfortable with the texts and author. I expressed my concerns about perpetuating the silencing of women by having a discussion on gender identities coming solely from the male perspective. She made a case for Tupac being the embodiment of Black masculinity for both men (“Thug Life”) and women (ultimate sex symbol). Using “Dear Mama” and “Wonda...” she wanted to compare and contrast the different portraits of Black women painted by Tupac (i.e. hip-hop). In the process, her and her students would question the notions of Black masculinity performed and represented by Tupac.

Part 1.

Activate Prior Knowledge. Ms. Brown began class by disclosing her own shortcomings as a teacher and person regarding the incident that occurred before Spring Break. She apologized to the boys for getting too emotional and to the girls for not holding them to the highest of standards. She also expressed her desires to revisit the topics in a more deliberate, productive fashion.

Students (and I) gasped as Ms. Brown unveiled the title of the unit and learning objectives written on the whiteboard:

“Wonder Why They Call You...”

SWBAT:

- (1) use their understandings of hip-hop culture to question portrayals of male and female identity as told through the works Tupac Shakur.
- (2) write 3-paragraph expository essays.

Guiding Questions:

- (1) *What double-standard does Tupac set for women?*
- (2) *What positive and negative images of the Black man does Tupac represent?*
- (3) *Who do you believe represents Black women positively within hip-hop?*

Introduce New Material. Ms. Brown was not afraid of taking curricular and pedagogical risks. In our initial interview I asked her what, if anything, was off limits in terms of explicit language or content. She replied, “I’m open-minded... I am not going to eliminate something from discussion or reading just because it has curse words on it.” Still, I was impressed by Ms. Brown’s framing of the unit around such a provocative theme.

In the song off his best-selling album, *All Eyez On Me* (1996), Tupac tells his “sistas” a cautionary tale to “keep ya head up, legs closed, eyes open.” The first verse reads:

Look here Miss Thang, hate to salt your game
but you’s a money hungry woman and you need to change.
In tha locker room all the homies do is laugh.
High five's cuz anotha nigga played your ass.

It was said you were sleezy, even easy
sleepin around for what you need
See it's your thang and you can shake it how you wanna.
Give it up free, or make your money on the corner.

But don't be bad and play the game get mad and change.
Then you wonda why these muthafuckas call you names.
Still lookin' for a way out and that's OK
I can see you wanna stray there's a way out.

Keep your mind on your money, enroll in school.
And as the years pass by you can show them fools.
But you ain't tryin' to hear me cuz your stuck,
you're headin' for the bathroom 'bout to get tossed up.

Still lookin' for a rich man you dug a ditch,
got your legs up tryin' to get rich.
I love you like a sista but you need to switch
and that's why they called U bitch, I betcha.

As Ms. Brown distributed printed copies of the lyrics to each student, she called attention to the fact that they would not be listening to music, but rather reading poems to enhance their communication (SWBAT #2), as well as social reasoning skills (SWBAT #1). These poems would not only serve as a catalyst for discussions on why men call Black women *bitches*, but also why women (and America) call Black men *niggas*. Regrettably, Ms. Brown's pedagogies *about* hip-hop were not nearly as "fair and balanced" as advertised.

Guided Practice. Ms. Brown divided students into two groups – boys vs. girls. The groups would have a total of 15 minutes to read and discuss the poems and create a "T-chart" that addresses the first guiding question: *What double-standard does Tupac set for women?*

Ms. Brown drew a T-chart on the whiteboard with *Mama* on one side and *B*tch* on the other. "Ladies first," of course, Ms. Brown gathered the following responses:

<u><i>Mama</i></u>	<u><i>B*tch</i></u>
<i>Black Queen (Boys & Girls)</i>	<i>Trick (Boys)</i>
<i>Committed (Girls)</i>	<i>Gold digger (Girls)</i>
<i>Sacrifice (Boys)</i>	<i>Jump-off (Boys)</i>
<i>Miracles (Girls)</i>	

An interesting conversation ensued as both the boys and girls nominated 'Black Queen':

Ms. Brown: Sing it with me y'all: "EVEN AS A CRACK FIEND MAMA, YOU ALWAYS WAS A BLACK QUEEN MAMA!" What do you think the mother as Black queen symbolizes? What images does it bring to mind?

Whitney: Royalty

C.J.: Africa

Kyree: [under his breath, yet audible to entire class] None of these broads.

Ms. Brown: Hold on now! Is your mama one of these broads? [Draws oohs and ahhs from the audience]

Kyree: Really? You got jokes!

Ms. Brown: I don't think it's a joke at all when a young brother disrespects women right in front of me. Really, my question is sincere: Why does he give his mother a break for being a crack head and two-time baby mama that the bitches he "gets around" with don't seem to be afforded?

Kyree: Ms. Brown know she want a man!

Ms. Brown: See, that's the difference – I *want* one, I don't *need* one, big difference! If it's okay I'd like to address the question at hand, thank you.

C.J.: Anyways... the difference is that my mama *gave* me life. These bitches [covering and coughing to disguise his word choice] Pac talkin' about tryin' to take his life away. Didn't he get locked up for exactly what he talkin' about?

Ms. Brown: I think we need to turn to the expert for that one. Mr. Bernard, what did Pac get locked up for?

Me: It was complicated... I'd suggest you'd do your own research, but he was convicted of sexual assault.

C.J.: I don't need to do any more research; I saw it on one of them... documentaries. He got set up!

Ms. Brown: Boy, would you summarize your argument please!

C.J.: My argument?

Ms. Brown: Yes, your argument. In one concise sentence, what is your point?

Sam: His argument is that some women hold you down; others tear you down.

Ms. Brown: Don't hurt 'em Sam! Mr. Bernard, did you get that?

Ms. Brown's plea to me signaled that she had received the answer she was looking for. Ms. Brown's (and Tupac's) notion of Black womanhood was constructed within what Pough (2004) calls the "classic madonna/whore split" (p. 93). *Real* women, like mama, "hold you down," or put their man and children above all else (especially their sexual desires). Contrarily, some bitches live by tearing men down – emotionally, financially, sexually – and in the process tear themselves, i.e. the Black family, down along with them.

Othermothering. This discourse demonstrates Ms. Brown's efforts to "mother the mind" (Collins, 1991, p. 191) of her students. Entrenched in Black feminist epistemologies, "othermothering" describes the mentoring relationships that often develop between Black female teachers and Black students. Collins (1991) writes:

Community othermothers demonstrate a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or individual self-actualization. Instead, the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward (p. 192).

After three years together, countless car rides to prospective internships and conversations with parents, her students were not her clients, but “her kids.” Ms. Brown trusted them to care for her biological children, whom they had watched grow-up. She reminded me that when she first met Kyree she was not even *Ms. Brown*; she went by her ex-husband’s last name. Her students knew that she went through a divorce; and they knew that she was getting her confidence or “swagger” back to the point she had started dating again. As demonstrated by the quite personal back-and-forth between Kyree and Ms. Brown, because they had so much time and energy invested in each other inside and outside the classroom, both parties seemed willing to give, and most importantly, take a little more from one another.

It was in Ms. Brown’s professional *and* personal interests that she prepare C.J., a prospective Division 1 student-athlete, for the trappings of “groupies” looking to tag along for the ride. She warned the boys, especially Kellen who was attractive and light-skinned, “that some girls would do anything to have a baby with pretty hair.”

Ms. Brown’s office often doubled as a community space, herself an intermediary “to diffuse the emotional intensity of relationships between bloodmothers and their daughters” (Collins, 1991, p. 188). I witnessed an occasion where Ms. Brown arbitrated a highly emotional, potentially physical, conflict between Yesenia and her mother regarding “womanly” matters. Another time, Malia asked Ms. Brown to broker a meeting

with her mother so that she could express her feelings about her mother’s recent “coming out,” and the ridicule she had been facing in school and the neighborhood.

Additional examples of Ms. Brown’s efforts to “self-actualize” her cultural-politics would emerge from Part 2 of the unit.

Part 2.

Guided Practice. Part 2 of the unit would be compromised by factors beyond Ms. Brown’s control. Principal Ardmore convened an unscheduled “Pick-Me-Up” to attend to some “family matters” or festering tensions between students. Ms. Brown was not only short 15 minutes; she had gained 12 students as the other 11th grade advisor, Ms. Forrest, called in sick. Alexis volunteered to recap the previous day’s conversation on Tupac’s double-standard for women. Wary of doubling the size (and distractions) of the groups, she gave students 10 minutes to respond to the last two guiding questions (What positive and negative images of the Black man does Tupac represent? Who, positively or negatively, represents the Black woman in hip-hop?) individually in their journals.

Drawing the T-chart on the whiteboard, Ms. Brown admitted that she probably should have asked this question first. When all was said and done the whiteboard read:

$\frac{+}{Thug Life}$
Sexy

$\frac{-}{Thug Life}$
Promiscuous (He gets around)

Jayvon, one of Ms. Forrest’s students, submitted *Thug Life* as both a positive and a negative. He thought it was admirable that “Pac ain’t back down from nobody!” Nobody being the police, White people in general, even haters in their own community. JoJo summarized the downsides with one of his usual “wise man” clichés: “You live by

it, you die by it.” To emphasize this point, Ms. Brown directed students to a line from “Dear Mama”:

Ms. Brown: How does the line ‘Even though I sell rocks, it feels good putting money in your mailbox’ capture the double-edged sword Jayvon is talking about?

Sam: I mean I live right near the drug set. My aunt is on dialysis so my older cousin slangs so he can pay those bills. At the same time, his older sister on PCP and be running around naked, embarrassing my family. I know why drug dealers do what they do. I don’t think they know what they really do.

Ms. Brown: Live by it, die by it. Here you have a man doin’ what he got to do to take care of his family, right? Only what he’s doing to keep his mama alive, or in Pac’s case, paying the rent, is killing, literally, his sister and *his* mama.

Kyree: Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do Ms. Brown.

Ms. Brown: I bet that’s exactly what the Negroes that shot Pac were thinking, too.

After querying, “Where my ladies at?” it was apparent that Ms. Brown was seeing what I was seeing. The girls had been awfully quiet during the large-group discussions.

Ms. Brown called on Brianna to share her opinion. Brianna resisted, asking if Ms. Brown would come back to her to answer the second question, to which she obliged. Malia, on the other hand, was anxious to have her voice heard: “For positives I put sexy. But for negatives I put promiscuous.” Responding to the snide remarks and gestures that came from classmates in reaction to Malia’s sophisticated word choice, Ms. Brown quickly reminded the class about the conversation they had on haters not five minutes ago. Ms. Brown affirmed Malia’s response noting, “he did represent for the dark-skinned brothas.”

“Wow! That sure sounds like you’re hating on light-skinned brothas Ms. Brown,” Kellen said with his customary sarcasm.

“No Kellen, that was me *celebrating* dark skin. What you’re doing now, not letting me pay a compliment to another Black person, *that’s* hating!”

Triumphantly, she brushed Kellen off, asking Malia, “Where were we?”

She added *He gets around* – a play on the title of one of Tupac’s most misogynistic songs – next to *promiscuous*. She made eye contact with me as she second-guessed herself, “I knew I should have printed the lyrics!” Even though she stated that she would not “eliminate something from discussion or reading just because it has curse words on it,” Ms. Brown’s old school hip-hop cultural identity deemed “I Get Around” as “not exactly poetry.” Now she was kicking herself for not having the content to underscore the double-standard Tupac sets for himself and the women in his life. Without being anchored in a specific text the discussions became overly dependent on Ms. Brown’s expertise (or lack thereof), and consequently, became exceedingly one-sided.

“Enough talk about men,” she stated transitioning to the second question. As promised, she returned to Brianna to get the conversation started. Brianna’s selection of Nicki Minaj seemed to catch Ms. Brown completely off guard. Partly in denial, partly in defiance, she posed the question: “Ladies, how many of you said Nicki Minaj?”

Thirteen of fourteen girls (Alexis was the lone dissenter) in class raised their hands. Clearly distraught, Ms. Brown vigorously erased the first T-chart and wrote *Nicki MINAJ* on the whiteboard. Repeatedly pounding *MINAJ* with the edge of her hand, she came back to Brianna, “I’m gonna need you to explain this to me.”

In reference to Nicki’s bisexuality, Brianna said, “She don’t care what other people got to say.”

Whitney complimented her trend setting fashion sense, stating, “She doin’ her thang with her ‘hood-Barbie style. You can hate if you want, but look at how many girls all of sudden got Chinese bangs.”

Whitney was right about one thing. Nicki Minaj's influence was felt all over the building, primarily through the posters promoting PHS' "Harajuku Prom" plastered on every door. At Pick-Me-Up on "business casual Fridays" one might think that pink, Nicki's favorite color, was one of the school's colors.

Frankly, I was somewhat surprised by the responses that came from the boys. Kellen responded directly to Whitney's mentioning of Barbie, "Yeah, she plastic like Barbie, too!"

C.J., much to Ms. Brown's delight, rhetorically questioned, "[Do] you *really* want your little sister to be like Nicki Minaj?"

Ms. Brown could not resist piling on, "That's what I'm saying. What y'all know about MC Lyte, Queen Latifah? [Singing] U.N.I.T.Y. These were real MCs, not just T-N-A!"

Saved by the bell, Ms. Brown postponed "independent practice" until "Social Reasoning" in the afternoon. After class, we agreed that the lesson suffered from some critical assumptions. Ms. Brown was attempting to empower students by asking them to draw on their prior knowledge of hip-hop culture. Although students were familiar with the mythology that is Tupac and "Thug Life," Tupac died in 1997 when Ms. Brown's 11th graders were toddlers. "U.N.I.T.Y." is a wonderful song; and absolutely pertinent to her desired socio-cultural outcomes, but the album *Black Reign* was released in 1993. Students knew Queen Latifah from films like *Set It Off* (1996), and more recently, *Just Wright* (2010), but they, through no fault of their own, did not know much about Queen Latifah the rapper. Furthermore, Ms. Brown's *old school* hip-hop cultural identity did not allow her to see past Nicki's sexuality and appreciate her for the incredible lyricist that

she is. On “Monster,” off Kanye West’s album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2011), Nicki more than holds her own along side titans such as Kanye, Jay-Z, and Rick Ross. Ironically, and unbeknownst to her, the old school rappers Ms. Brown canonized as “real MCs” continue to face their own rumors of homosexuality. Lyte and Latifah desexualized themselves to enter the hypermasculine space that is hip-hop music. Whereas Nicki Minaj, like Lil Kim and Foxy Brown before her, performed hypersexualized identities to be heard.

Part 3.

Independent Practice. Learning would be formally assessed through an expository essay assignment formatted according to state-standardized testing protocols. Students were given 30 minutes to compose a 3-paragraph essay responding to the following prompt written on the whiteboard:

Using examples from the poems of Tupac Shakur and your own experience or observation, write an essay analyzing portrayals of male and female identity in hip-hop culture.

Ms. Brown made concerted efforts to demystify the anxieties that come with “high-stakes” testing. During “Test Mode” there was absolutely no talking or collaboration. She stressed to students that they would not be graded on the accuracy of their beliefs about Nicki Minaj per se, but rather their organization, word usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. She also reminded students to allocate their time wisely. A maximum of five minutes should be dedicated to pre-writing the topic sentence and points of analysis of each paragraph. If their outline was thorough enough then they should be able to compose three 4-6 sentence paragraphs in 20 minutes with five minutes remaining to

review and revise. In the weeks leading up to the test, Ms. Brown transitioned students from the work of Tupac Shakur to that of John Steinbeck.

Summary. In interviews, Ms. Brown was explicit in her desires to transform her curriculum and inspire social action within her culture. Ms. Brown's canonization of Tupac Shakur proved effective in creating culturally relevant test preparation activities where students practiced organizing and composing expository essays modeled after the state standardized test. Although culturally relevant test preparation is pragmatic given the high-stakes associated with her students' performance, my classroom observations indicate that even in PHS, where challenging hegemonic notions of teaching and learning was part of the school's mission, the interests of schooling overwhelmed Ms. Brown's transformative intentions. Additionally, the *old school hipopper's* pedagogies *with* and *about* the poetry of Tupac Shakur, and her subsequent "deposits" of *real* Black masculine and feminine identities reflected her generational, class, and gender positionalities in hip-hop more so than her students.

Transformative Approaches

I witnessed transformative hip-hop-based curricular approaches in Mr. Candler's unit, "What is the purpose of education?" As the title of the unit suggests, the theoretically grounded, self-described "critical pedagogue" was explicit in his efforts to improve students' comprehension of the world, as well as the word (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Despite possessing vastly superior content-knowledge of hip-hop and technological savvy than Ms. Oxley and Ms. Brown, Mr. Candler's *out-of-school* hip-hop

cultural identity (particularly his racial “otherness”) complicated teacher-student relations in ways that muted his effectiveness in accomplishing his social action objectives.

Critical Pedagogue. Mr. Candler said that his experiences in a Master’s program at an Ivy League University near the city of study, “imbued in Freirean philosophy,” had the most significant influence on his decisions and actions as a teacher. His “radical political worldview” became clear as he defined his purpose as an educator:

To me, first and foremost teaching is a human act – a human exchange of experiences and a shared experience with a shared aim at creating knowledge and meaning. There’s nothing human about the corporate model of education that TFA has for its training, its policies, their growth model. I think their teaching as leadership rubric perpetuates a lot of the contemporary mythology around education. Such as teacher as expert, teacher as rugged individualist. You know... that savior syndrome kinda crap. Luckily, or unluckily for them, I studied a year of education before showing up. I had read enough philosophy, you know, Dewey and Vygotsky, before I was told what a scripted curriculum was. I immediately said, “WAIT! You *want* blank slates with no prior experience to teach in America’s toughest schools? It’s *that* simple?”

Of the four members of the cohort, Mr. Candler was the only teacher that had heard of critical or culturally relevant pedagogy. Here, he invokes the names of Freire, Dewey, and Vygotsky to position himself as a “transformative intellectual” (Giroux, 1988) in the critical pedagogy tradition, distinguishing his radical teaching ideologies from Teach For America’s “corporate model of education.”

In *Teachers As Intellectuals* (1988) Giroux states:

The category of intellectual is helpful in a number of ways. First, it provides a theoretical basis for examining teacher work as a form of intellectual labor, as opposed to defining it in purely instrumental or technical terms. Second, it clarifies the kinds of ideological and practical conditions necessary for teachers to function as intellectuals. Third, it helps to make clear the role teachers play in producing and legitimizing various political, economic and social interests through the pedagogies they endorse and utilize. (p. 125)

Mr. Candler was also distinguishing himself from his colleagues in PHS. In many ways our researcher-participant relationship was built on our common, *uncommon* positionalities in the academy and Riverfront. In retrospect, I believe Mr. Candler was already questioning his effectiveness as a teacher long before I arrived. In contrast to Ms. Oxley and Ms. Brown, he was empowered by a space where he could engage in the “intellectual” discourses of teacher education that validated his beliefs and labor. Unfortunately (and as Ms. Oxley forewarned), Mr. Candler’s pedagogies were so deeply entrenched in the academy that he perpetuated a similarly disconcerting progressive brand of savior syndrome.

Hip-hop (music and videos) as Political Text. In this passage Mr. Candler offers his rationale for incorporating hip-hop into his curriculum and pedagogy:

Right, so it’s a political choice for every text we bring or don’t bring into the classroom. So I’m aware that it’s valuable for a sense of empowerment in literacy to see oneself in the text. In [city’s name], hip-hop is one of those texts that I believe my students see themselves within. One I try to use as a means to dig deeper into ourselves and other texts. As far as approaching so-called alternative texts, I always found it a part of engaging prior experience to take texts from everyday life and use them as the bridge to the more critical approach to those texts. Beyond that, I think that it’s extraordinarily important for me and my students to bring things that we love into the classroom. So for me, I wouldn’t treat hip-hop any differently than a painting, a poem, or a story that I, or my students, deeply care about. Last year I would use it as like a hook for a lesson. I played Young Jeezy for a lesson where we read Obama’s speech on race. And for me it just felt gimmicky; it didn’t align with some Dewey piece about bringing experience to inform curricula. He’s like, we’re not using this to trick people into paying attention. We’re actually using it to like continue to build knowledge in that area, or through that area. So for me, I’m always conscious of *how* it’s being used. The hook can’t be the end in itself...

Once again, Mr. Candler employs the “language of critique and possibility” (Giroux, 1988) to underscore the political nature of schooling, in this case, his hip-hop based curricular interventions. Given his time at CCHS, Mr. Candler relished the curricular and

pedagogical autonomy and administrative support provided by PHS and Principal Ardmore. Prior to witnessing Mr. Candler's approaches to hip-hop as political texts, I observed him engaging students in Marxist, Feminist, and Critical Race Theories and using these various lenses to analyze traditional, as well as "alternative" texts.

There was nothing *alternative*, *gimmicky*, or *additional* about hip-hop's cultural or literary validity for this *out-of-school hipopper*. In Chapter 4 I explained that Mr. Candler constructed hip-hop as a Black cultural and political space. He drew counter-hegemonic ideas from hip-hop that problematized dominant discourses regarding legitimate language forms, modes of reasoning, social relations, and lived experiences. The piece he was referring to, Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938/1967), argues students' "primary experiences," also known as *culture*, should be the foundation for all pedagogical projects. Reflecting on his own mistakes in the past, his goal was no longer to use hip-hop "to trick people into paying attention" (as Ms. Oxley did), but as a means to facilitate reflective inquiry, or "secondary experiences" (Dewey, 1938/1967), and communication skills.

"What is the Purpose of Education?" (Featuring KRS-One). I observed Mr. Candler's transformative curricular approaches in his unit, "What is the purpose of education?" The following learning objectives were listed on the first slide of Mr. Candler's PowerPoint:

SWBAT (a) identify Aristotle's rhetorical devices and apply them to persuasive essays, (b) analyze hip-hop artists and texts for their political and social commentary, and (c) critique the different purposes of education that operate in [city name] and America.

Activate Prior Knowledge. The starter activity asked students to name the qualities that separate the great rappers from "the good, the bad, and the ugly." Students

mentioned things like “swagger” and “realness,” and were able to contextualize their responses in greater detail with the encouragement of Mr. Candler. He made the connection that the qualities that make a good rapper or MC are very similar to the qualities that make effective writers. In his words, “style, substance, and credibility.”

From here, he transitioned to his PowerPoint presentation projected on to a screen in the front of the classroom. He asked students to take notes on Aristotle’s rhetorical devices as they unpacked the terms. For ethos he pointed to Jay-Z as a credible source of “what’s hot and what’s not,” a student named George as a video game expert, himself as a writing coach, and the students as authorities on what growing up in Riverfront is like. After doing this for logos (logic or facts used to support claims) and pathos (appeals to reader’s emotions), he presented the last slide that read: *Your task is to use your position of authority, reliable statistics, and emotional appeals to persuade me in what the purpose of education should be in [city name].*

Introduce New Material. Mr. Candler used Googlewave video files of Boogie Down Productions’ (BDP) “You Must Learn” (1989) as guided and independent practice in analyzing printed rap lyrics and music videos for their political content, as well as examples of Aristotle’s rhetorical devices.

Hailing from the “Boogie Down” (South) Bronx, BDP was comprised of KRS-One, DJ Scott LaRock, and D-Nice. The video, thematically framed as a news telecast, begins as KRS-One, aka The Teacha, stands at the head of the class instructing students in Genesis 11: 14. Recounting the genealogy of Shem (Noah’s eldest son), this chapter and verse has been interpreted by some to suggest that we are all descendants of people with Black skin. His lecture is interrupted by a White male authority figure that abruptly

retracts a map of Africa before throwing KRS-One out of school. KRS-One proceeds to conduct class in the park, “schooling” the youth using his customary two turntables and a microphone:

It's calm yet wild the style that I speak
Just filled with facts and you will never get weak
in the heart, In fact you'll start to illuminate,
knowledge to others in a song let me demonstrate

the force of knowledge, knowledge reigned supreme
The ignorant is ripped to smithereens
What do you mean when you say I'm rebellious
'Cause I don't accept everything that you're telling us

What are you selling us, the creator dwellin' us
I sit in your unknown class while you're failing' us
I failed your class 'cause I ain't with your reasoning
You're tryin' make me you by seasoning

Up my mind with see Jane run,
see John walk in a hardcore New York
Come on now that's like a chocolate cow
It doesn't exist no way, no how

It seems to me that in a school that's ebony
African history should be pumped up steadily,
but it's not and this has got to stop,
See Spot run, run get Spot

Insulting, to a Black mentality,
a Black way of life or a jet Black family,
so I conclude with one concern,
that YOU MUST LEARN!

Chorus: Just like I told you, you must learn (twice)

I believe that if you're teaching history
Filled with straight up facts no mystery
Teach the student what needs to be taught
'Cause Black and White kids both take shorts

When one doesn't know about the other ones' culture
Ignorance swoops down like a vulture
'Cause you don't know that you ain't just a janitor

No one told you about Benjamin Banneker

A brilliant Black man that invented the almanac
Can't you see where KRS is coming at
With Eli Whitney, Haile Selassie
Granville Woods made the walkie-talkie

Lewis Latimer improved on Edison
Charles Drew did a lot for medicine
Garrett Morgan made the traffic lights
Harriet Tubman freed the slaves at night

Madame CJ Walker made a straightenin comb
But you won't know this is you weren't shown
The point I'm gettin' at it it might be harsh
'Cause we're just walkin' around brainwashed

So what I'm sayin' is not to diss a man
we need the 89 school system
One that caters to a Black return
because YOU MUST LEARN!

Guided Practice. Mr. Candler guided students through 4 “readings” of the texts:

1. Watch and listen to the video in its entirety
2. Read and annotate the 1st verse of written text while listening to song
3. Watch and listen to 2nd verse and hold up color-coded cards when students hear and/or see examples of ethos, logos, and pathos.
4. Re-read the 2nd verse independently and complete worksheet

After the first read Mr. Candler asked students to identify the author’s claim. One voice, Gayle’s, emerged over the rest:

Gayle: YOU MUST LEARN!

Mr. Candler: According to the video, what makes him a credible source?

Gayle: He’s teaching class.

Mr. Candler: Then the next question is why?

Elliott: ‘Cause you can’t trust schools and teachers.

Mr. Candler: What evidence or data does he provide to support this claim?

Elliott: Like what Gayle said. When he’s giving us that list of historic Blacks its like he’s teaching what schools ain’t.

Mr. Candler: That’s exactly what I want you to do. Draw the reader in, then give fact-based arguments that appeal to the reader’s emotions. How does he (KRS) appeal to our emotions?

Brittany: Is sayin’ that we brainwashed pathos?

Mr. Candler: I don't know, you tell me how that made you feel?

Brittany: At first I was kinda mad, but I was talking to [unnamed neighbor] and she really didn't know any of these people either.

Mr. Candler: So what's he trying to convince us of? [in response to awkward silence he notes that these points are so crucial that he'll clarify them himself. Turns off projector and removes screen to write on the board.] *Schools should teach everyone each other's culture. Black and Brown youth must take responsibility for their own education!*

Independent Practice. With 10 minutes remaining in class students were instructed to re-read the verses independently and answer the short-answer questions on the accompanying worksheet:

- (1) *According to KRS-One, what is the purpose of education?*
- (2) *What logic or facts does he use to support his claim?*
- (3) *What line(s) created the most significant emotional response from you? Why?*
- (4) *Pick one unfamiliar name listed by KRS-One and tell me who, what, where, when, and why they contributed to American history.*
- (5) *This song is more than 20 years old. Are KRS-One's critiques of the "89 school system" still relevant in 2010?*

Assessment of Learning. Learning would be formally assessed the next day through a persuasive essay. The pre-writing activity called on students to create a "3-ring" Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the positions of DuBois, Washington, and KRS-One. Mr. Candler passed out the prompt for their persuasive essay, highlighting that students were required to use a minimum of three quotes from KRS, DuBois, and/or Washington.

After class was dismissed, we shook hands as I complimented him on a creative and challenging lesson. His first reflection was that the multiple readings of multiple texts required more than the 50 minutes he had to work with on this day (Pick-Me-Up took first 30 minutes of this day). He was right. The lesson, particularly the third reading, did feel rushed as he had to stop and start to allow students to support their respective claims.

But I consoled him in the fact that students' participation in the dialogue and guided practice seemed to increase over the four readings.

His second reflection was of far greater interest to me as the *out-of-school hip hopper* wrestled with what Hill (2009) describes as "canonizing the real":

Mr. Candler: What's the difference between KRS-One and Shakespeare?

Me: Is that a trick question?

Mr. Candler: I don't know man... I feel like I just deposited classic hip-hop.

While Mr. Candler's hip-hop cultural identity enabled him to see KRS-One in the same light as Shakespeare, he recognized the cultural and political dimensions of a White male deeming which hip-hop artist is and is not sophisticated enough to warrant intellectual analysis. Some of the disappointment in his voice came with the realization that he and I thought the lesson was way cooler than the students did. In hindsight, he realized the likelihood that KRS-One may have been equally as generationally *irrelevant* to his students as Shakespeare was believed to be. Most of the students acknowledged hearing of KRS-One, but unconsciously, Mr. Candler's failure to contextualize him beyond "a pioneer of old school rap" did have a depositing affect. I admit spending much of the 50 minutes biting my tongue, wanting to explain the acronym that is his name: Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone. On the worksheet, he did ask students to consider KRS-One's credibility as a source and the relevance of the issue more than 20 years since the song's creation. What was lacking, we determined, was a fifth question that pushed students to think about what, if any, contemporary rappers serve as teachers.

In our exit interview, Mr. Candler reflected at length on his "genuine" use of BDP (KRS-One):

So you were there for the purpose of education unit. Yeah we did rhetorical devices ethos, pathos, and logos through a KRS-One song about education. So for

me, I was attempting to... every text we did in that unit was like totally loaded: DuBois and Washington, MLK and Malcolm. We read a couple articles on demystifying college. And we read and watched the video of the KRS piece. So like each of those is a political decision. To bring the rap song into class was one; I wanted them to understand the way KRS was being persuasive. I wanted them to understand that what he was doing was political. What he was doing was social commentary, and doing it through art. I value that; I care about that. And so it was genuine for me to introduce this and say, "Okay, do you see connections to DuBois? What about Washington?" So to have them go through the lyrics and try to say this is logos because he's talking about statistics. And, you know, this is pathos because it evokes feeling for me.

In his mind, Mr. Candler believed his hip-hop based curricular approaches and pedagogical strategies were *real* because they were consistent with the "political and aesthetic ideals" of hip-hop, his own progressive politics as a radical educator, and according to the title of his Master's thesis, his intellectual interests in "imagining [educational] spaces for aesthetic experience and critical consciousness." As I will demonstrate in the next section centered on the unit, "In This Future You Can't Forget Your Past," "playing his position" as an *out-of-school hiphopper* and White male in Riverfront made him very conscious of his pedagogies *about* hip-hop, especially when it came to asserting his authority in discourses on Black cultural-politics.

"[Building Community is] not Origami!" (*Or is it?*). In spite of his transformative curricular approaches and working in an institutional context with small class sizes, Mr. Candler's identities as racial and cultural 'other' impaired the establishment and maintenance of the teacher-student relationships needed to meet the criterion of culturally relevant.

In our initial interview, Mr. Candler said the following in response to my questions about his methods for building community:

The best way to build community is to show genuine interest in their passions and interests. IT'S NOT ORIGAMI! It's not fake either, "Ooh, I like motorbikes

too!” Every quarter I ask students to fill out a questionnaire that asks them to nominate 3 places, websites or radio stations where I can find artists and music that best represents their tastes or emotions. I mean in my car right now, the programmed stations are [college radio station], [college radio station], and I think 3 mainstream hip-hop and R & B stations. I’m not from around here, how do you think I found that out?

As not only a racial and cultural, but also geographic ‘other’ in Riverfront, Mr. Candler recognized the importance of structuring social relations (and curriculum) around the “tastes and emotions” of his students. Still, in his claim, “[building community is] not origami!” Mr. Candler downplays the complex nature of this task and questions the authenticity of teachers who think about teacher-student relations in such technocratic terms. Then he turns around and boasts about asking students to complete questionnaires to learn about their “passions and interests.”

Mr. Candler would go on to say: “Most relationships are built when the lights aren’t on. The informal conversations during independent work time, passing time, you know, lunch, when we can let our guards down. It means constantly trying to repair the bridges way before the point of collapse.” In comparison to the other members of the cohort teaching in PHS, Mr. Candler struggled to translate the individual relationships he formed (and reformed) with students during lunch and in the car into a collaborative learning community when the lights were in fact on.

“In This Future You Can’t Forget Your Past.” *Learning Objectives.* The unit – “In This Future You Can’t Forget Your Past” – was born directly from Mr. Candler’s Master’s thesis. Mr. Candler’s ultimate goal, as expressed by his second PowerPoint slide, was to *talk about the function of art and the structural dilemmas people of color face in America.* The initial lesson of the unit centered on a painting by Nigerian artist Chris Ofili titled, “No Woman, No Cry.” The painting was inspired by the 1993 racially

motivated murder of a Jamaican-British teen named Stephen Lawrence in a middle-class neighborhood in Greenwich, England. The intended academic achievements included identifying the symbolism behind colors and developing persuasive essays.

Part 1.

Activate Prior Knowledge. Mr. Candler activated students' prior knowledge through an informal (non-graded) reflective writing assignment. His third slide read: *Describe something in your life, community, or experience that you think people need to pay more attention to.*

This morning, like most mornings, began with Mr. Candler helping Jerry and Cesar find something – usually a writing utensil and/or their journals. Mr. Candler had his back turned when the flash of Elizabeth's camera-phone caught everyone's attention. PHS had a strict "see no, hear no" cell phone policy. Mr. Candler told her that she was violating school policy and that he would have to confiscate the phone until he had a conversation with her mother.

Elizabeth refused, daring Mr. Candler, "Bet! The number right here; we can call her right now!"

Mr. Candler looked to the sky before giving in, "You know what Elizabeth... There are some people in here who are prepared for class, and are on-task, and would like my help. I'm gonna give you another 60 seconds to get with the program before I call your bluff."

When the alarm on his kitchen timer rang five minutes later Mr. Candler stated, "I noticed Pinky, Gayle, and Tamir using their time wisely. Would the three of you mind helping to get us back on track?"

Pinky mentioned the high rates of teen pregnancy in her community. Gayle chose to read her response word-for-word, arguing that contrary to popular belief, every Black kid in Riverfront does not sell drugs. She wanted people to pay more attention to the positive people (such as herself) and things (like her church's community-service) happening in Riverfront. Tamir, despite Jerry's random exclamations of "trappin' ain't dead" (the mantra of rapper Young Jeezy), pulled from a story in the local news about "crooked cops" that had recently been arrested in Riverfront.

Mr. Candler said, "The thing that bothers me the most is that none of this – the teen pregnancy, the stereotypes that plague [city name], crooked cops – none of it is new. But now more than ever, nobody seems to do anything about it."

Highlighting the title of the unit, Mr. Candler explained that some artists, like KRS-One, Bob Marley, and Chris Ofili, used their respective talents, not only to entertain, but to also combat the larger structural forces at the heart of these experiences.

Introduce New Material. Students burst into laughter as Mr. Candler revealed the profile portrait of a crying African woman with exaggerated lips, forehead, and braided hair. Mr. Candler responded, "I was afraid that some of you lacked the maturity to do this, but I'm still hopeful that you'll prove me wrong."

After students composed themselves, he instructed them to "Write down the story or stories this painting is telling you. What meanings can you find? What ideas, emotions, and beliefs does this conjure up in you?" To aid students in their assessments he wrote *What I See* and *What I Think* on opposite sides of the whiteboard.

Moving from his left to right, he went around the room asking each student to share their insights:

Gayle: I put this African woman has lost something dear to her.
India: African princess who is sad.

Hunched over, Harmony did not raise her eyes from her desk to acknowledge that it was her turn.

Mr. Candler: C'mon Harmony... You know I've never had a problem with a wrong answer. But I got a big problem with wrong attitudes. Which one can I help you fix?

Without saying a word, Harmony sent a clear message, turning her head toward Mr. Candler and cutting him with her eyes.

"I'll take *that* as your final answer," said Mr. Candler.

He asked for the class' cooperation so that he and Harmony could have a private discussion in the hallway. Less than a minute later, Mr. Candler returned to the room the very moment Cesar launched a hand full of Smarties candy across the room in Marquis's direction, pelting Elizabeth among other unintended targets.

Mr. Candler hurried in front of a now raging Elizabeth determined to get her hands on Cesar. As he escorted Elizabeth back to her seat and ordered Cesar to join Harmony at the tables at the rear of the classroom his frustrations came to a head:

You know what... It seemed like Harmony and I had gotten off on the wrong foot this morning. Here I am thinking I could trust you to have a two-minute conversation and I return to find kindergartners. I'm afraid that I'm starting to lose.

Mr. Candler made one final attempt to piece things back together:

Mr. Candler: Pinky would you save us please!

Pinky: Emotional widow... symbolizes what happened to African-Americans during slavery.

Kobe: All I put was crying for comfort... that should be the title.

Marquis: She crying 'cause she so ugly and black!

Cesar: He stole mine! Super lips, super black [laughter]! Mr. Candler, why Black people lips so big? [More laughter].

Through the gut-busting hilarity I overheard Kimberly, half joking, half serious, ask, “Mr. Candler, is that a weave?”

It was excruciating for me to listen to students’ comments and not be able to do anything about it. Instead of engaging the substance of Marquis, Cesar, or Kimberly’s comments and questions directly, he changed the subject, suggesting, “The artist *is* challenging us. But based on the insensitivity of those comments it’s clear that some of us aren’t ready for this kind of challenge.” At this point, I started to doubt whether hip-hop, Teach For America, or his Ivy League education prepared Mr. Candler for *this* kind of challenge.

Introduce New Material. Unmistakably annoyed, Mr. Candler distributed printed copies of the article, “The Murder of Stephen Lawrence” for students to read independently in the remaining 15 minutes of class. Initially, Mr. Candler planned to do a large-group reading; however, with his much anticipated lesson plan now in ruins, he resorted to the authoritarian “silent, and I do mean *silent* reading.”

Part 2.

After reviewing the article with students in afternoon advisory, as well as meeting with Principal Ardmore, Mr. Candler looked forward to the fresh start afforded by the new day. Mr. Candler’s PowerPoint listed the learning objectives as follows:

- (1) *analyze Ofili’s color palate*
- (2) *assign colors to appropriate themes*
- (3) *develop persuasive essays*

Mr. Candler asked students to take notes as he introduced the themes associated with different colors: blue (peace, cold, stable), red (intensity, passion, love), green (nature, youth, envy), yellow (joy, idealism, betrayal), orange (energy, balance, warmth),

brown (earth, home, reliability), white (life, purity, innocence) and black (death, power, fear). The truce only lasted two slides before Cesar exclaimed, “Yellow is the queerest color.”

Mr. Candler replied quickly and cleverly to Cesar’s homophobic comment, “Funny, I didn’t see that when I was doing my research?”

Cesar countered, “If you keep calling me out I’m going to keep messin’ you up!”

Mr. Candler answered, “Did that sound like an admission of deliberately violating the classroom norms that WE established? What do y’all think?”

Bested this time, Cesar fell in line and even participated shortly thereafter, “I bet you black means the opposite of white!”

I did not see comparable incidences of such outright insubordination in the other classrooms I observed. Notice that Mr. Candler did not hesitate to assert his authority when it came to classroom discourses on queerness. Mr. Candler responded to this challenge with the appropriate balance of firmness and humor. Due in part to his illiteracies as a cultural “outsider,” Mr. Candler often overreacted to verbal jabs from his students, turning proverbial molehills (like frequent immature comments from 9th graders) into mountains. Other times, he treated mountains (like students’ responses to the portrait of the African woman) like molehills. Let me be clear, homophobia is definitely a “mountain” in hip-hop culture, as well as the classroom. But in this moment, Cesar was simply looking to get a rise out of Mr. Candler and laugh out of his peers. And on this occasion, Mr. Candler played Cesar’s game and beat him at it.

Independent Practice. Mr. Candler informed students that they had five minutes to pick one color, and using their notes, write a 4-6 sentence paragraph explaining why

Ofilé might have used certain colors. “Why set the portrait of Mrs. Lawrence against a yellow backdrop?” said Mr. Westland. “Of all the colors, why make her eye shadow blue, or shirt orange? Why would any artist put their work on brown elephant dung?”

With the additional notes, as well as guiding questions, students seemed more willing to take the risks associated with interpreting Ofilé’s stories. Mr. Candler praised Harmony, Gayle, Pinky, Tamir, and Cesar for using their time wisely. Bothered by Jerry who once again was unprepared for class and had not taken any notes, Kobe abruptly stood up and asked if he could move.

Mr. Candler came to Kobe’s defense, saying, “Absolutely not! You have every right to be a part of this community. Jerry has made it clear that he isn’t going to fulfill his responsibilities to himself or his community – let him move.” Stating “get up” and nothing more, Mr. Candler scooped up Jerry’s jacket, backpack, and other scattered materials and dumped them on the table at the rear of the classroom.

Before seeking students’ interpretations, Mr. Candler said that he wanted to make his point in another way. He played “Beautiful” (2002) by Snoop Dogg (featuring Pharrell) on his computer, asking students to write down three words that describe how Snoop’s voice sounds. Mr. Candler wrote student’s responses of *tired, calm, coarse, high, gutter, smooth, confident, dog, thirsty* on the whiteboard:

Mr. Candler: Think about the words you used. The same thing that Marquis said was gutter, Cesar called it smooth. How might Ofilé’s painting be simultaneously gutter or crude and smooth?

Marquis: I don’t see the connection.

Mr. Candler: What part of the painting is crude?

Kobe: The shit.

Mr. Candler: Yes, the elephant dung. What about Snoop’s rap?

Harmony: When he’s talkin’ ‘bout sex.

Mr. Candler: Good. What’s smooth? [pointing to painting on screen]

Gayle: His use of color...

Mr. Candler: How so?

Gayle: I thought that it was cool that her eyes are cold, but like her heart is still warm.

Mr. Candler: OK! Did anyone see it differently?

Tamir: I didn't see that... I was trying to figure out the yellow. It can't be joy 'cause she crying, so it must mean betrayal.

Mr. Candler: Betrayal by who?

Pinky: By the people who killed her son.

Mr. Candler: Or what about the fact that to this day, no one has been brought to justice? What's worse, your teenage son being the victim of a hate crime, or the idea that five white men can commit a hate crime and get away with it?

Mr. Candler explained that Ofili's art had two motivations: "To tell silenced stories like that of Stephen Lawrence and to challenge black stereotypes." To illustrate the latter point, he presented a photo of Snoop as the pimp, Huggy Bear, from *Starsky & Hutch* (2004) next to Ofili's painting "The Adoration of Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars." He instructed students to write down the definition of *archetype*, "the definition or epitome of a stereotype," in their notes.

Marquis: That looks like Shaft and them supa niggas?

Candler: [smiling] Yeah...

Kobe: What you mean supa niggas?

Marquis: Instead of super heroes they was supa niggas.

Mr. Candler: How were these supa Ns smooth, yet crude?

Marquis: Dolemite was a pimp; he knew like karate and stuff. It was hilarious.

Right in the middle of this transformational moment where Marquis was teaching the class about Blaxploitation films like Shaft and Dolemite, the class was rudely interrupted by Jerry, who, unbeknownst to Mr. Candler (and I), managed to pull up a video of the archetypical "crack head" acting crazy on the computer.

Again, the class exploded in laughter; Candler in anger, "FIRST, we all know someone who's been impacted by drug abuse and *this* is funny? Jerry, you can't bring a pencil or paper to class, take notes or read, but you can turn on the computer and make fun of vulnerable people?"

Quickly approaching his breaking point, Mr. Candler apologized to me for having to witness such behaviors and asked if I would be so kind as to rejoin them again tomorrow.

I walked away concerned, wondering if, and how, I should approach Principal Ardmore about the blatant insubordination I was observing. The last thing I wanted to do was violate Mr. Candler's trust, but the learning environment was neither safe nor productive at this point. I spent the lunch hour in my car in the PHS parking lot, pouring over my notes, writing feverishly, and deliberating my course of action. Thankfully, Mr. Candler had just left Principal Ardmore's office and was heading to lunch as I was returning to the building. Smiling and shaking his head, he feigned, "Was that good for you too?" I followed him to the parking lot, and with his permission to record our conversation, we spent the next 45 minutes standing on opposite sides of his station wagon reflecting on the highs and lows of the past weeks and months.

Mr. Candler welcomed "having another set of eyes in there" and the critical feedback that came with it. I complimented him on a well-designed lesson plan with explicitly stated academic, cultural, and critical learning objectives. However, from my vantage points as a researcher and cultural "insider," Mr. Candler missed the chance to have at minimum three conversations related to students' cultural competencies as African descendants that organically emerged from discussion and would have served his larger goals of enhancing students' critical consciousness of structural inequality. One in response to the self-hatred Marquis and Cesar expressed in their disgust of Africanness; and a second on "weave" and the Eurocentric standards of beauty Black women are subjected to in this country. To his credit, Mr. Candler was on his way to talking about

the media's (and hip-hop's) exploitations of Black racial archetypes before Jerry's disruption.

I pushed him on his political decisions to not engage in racially-charged discourses:

Me: They got to know who they were and who they are before they can understand what happened in between.

Mr. Candler: In retrospect you're right... But I'm always afraid they'll be like, how you gon' tell us our history? Why we gotta learn about Black people, 'cause we Black?

Me: I'd be the first person to tell you that these conversations are much easier said than done. I hate to throw [Peggy] McIntosh at you, but isn't that White privilege? If we're waiting for a bunch of dreads to show up to teach them their history everybody's going to be sadly disappointed. It is your history as much as it is ours.

Mr. Candler: You don't think it's problematic for a White guy to narrate Black kids on weave?

Me: I get it, trust me, I get it. But it's not nearly as problematic as Black and Dominican kids calling their ancestors ugly.

There were some extenuating circumstances behind Jerry's behaviors. Much of Mr. Candler's frustration, I would learn, was that Jerry spent two hours in his car the prior day listening to Young Jeezy and talking about problems at home. Both in words and body language, Mr. Candler expressed his disappointment. Here he was, a White man with and from privilege who was eager to help expose the larger structural forces (he repeated this phrase quite often) behind some of his students' experiences in Riverfront and they still rejected him as if he was just another (White) teacher. He, too, was seriously questioning if any combination of John Dewey, classic hip-hop, and paternalism would make him an effective teacher in this school and city. My fears would be confirmed as he told me in confidence that he recently notified Principal Ardmore that he would not be returning to PHS next year. He missed his family back in Northern California. Moreover, he blamed himself and Teach For America (but not "Ivy League

University”) for underestimating the challenges of teaching as racial, cultural, and geographic “outsider.”

Summary. In theory, Mr. Candler’s hip-hop based curricular approaches were transformational; his lessons and units aligned with the academic and socio-cultural objectives of critical pedagogy. In practice, I found the *out-of-school hipopper’s* unwillingness and inability to “keep it real,” or assert his authority in discourses about hip-hop’s (Black) cultural-politics negatively impacted the teacher-student relations paramount to achieving the social action he aspired to in our interviews.

Social Action Approaches

Ms. Brown’s *old school* hip-hop cultural identity limited her effectiveness in making canonical selections and developing pedagogical strategies to achieve her goals as an “agent of change.” With that said, those same cultural politics and beliefs about teaching and learning influenced Ms. Brown’s social action approach and successful transformation of the PHS model of project-based assessments by requiring students’ Exhibitions to be community-based.

Quan, for instance, was interested in being a chef. In addition to his internship at a hotel restaurant Ms. Brown led him in researching the effects of diabetes and “food deserts” on Black and urban communities. His (and her) work was not done upon completion and delivery of his PowerPoint presentation to the class; he would also host a healthy eating habits “seminar” for elementary-age students at the nearby Boys & Girls Club. Yesenia, an aspiring journalist and daughter of illegal immigrants, used her newfound network at a local newspaper and bilingual skills to create a district newsletter

geared toward Spanish-speaking students and parents. Two students, Kyree and Charlise, developed projects based on their individual interests/talents in hip-hop culture to promote change and “wounded healing” (Hill, 2009, p. 240) among their targeted populations.

“The Answer”: A Social Action Hip-hop Concert. During my initial visit with Ms. Brown she asked Kyree and Charlise, who were staying after school, to describe their respective projects to me. Kyree explained that commercial rap was all about “D-Boys” [drug dealers] and “shaking ass” and that his goal (like Ms. Brown) was to “change hip-hop.” Ms. Brown matched his interests in “hip-hop entrepreneurship” with an internship at a community arts center operated by Riverfront Parks and Recreation. His project involved organizing a hip-hop concert called “The Answer” where PHS students and youth across the district would have a platform to use their music to better their community.

The community arts center’s small auditorium was filled with approximately 40 students and family members on this Saturday afternoon. Kyree opened the show by outlining his objectives of his Exhibition, noting the rules (no profanity or usage of the ‘N-word’, no derogatory statements, and no sexually explicit lyrics), and thanking Ms. Brown and Charlise for their assistance in making this happen.

The show was headlined by “Lil Biggie,” an 11 year-old rapper from Riverfront who recited lyrics written by his uncle (and manager) over instrumentals of “Beamer, Benz or Bentleys” (2010) by Lloyd Banks (featuring Juelz Santana) and “Every Girl” (2009) by Young Money (Lil Wayne, Drake, Nicki Minaj, Jae Millz, Gudda, & Mack Maine). For Lil Biggie and his uncle, rap music was a business. And, according to his

uncle, The Answer was just another opportunity for his nephew to hone his performance skills and expand his following. “Representin’ God’s power,” “Peace” and “Love,” two gospel rappers from CCHS, performed three tracks over original beats. For them, rap music was their vehicle for spreading the word of God and calling into question the ungodly behaviors that have become synonymous with Riverfront. Charlise prefaced her autobiographical piece, “Wrong Place, Wrong Time,” by saying, “I don’t rap, but I got something to say!” The Answer provided Charlise with a space to demonstrate her lyrical abilities as a spoken-word poet, and expose and heal the wounds suffered at the hands (and words) of her mother.

Spoken-word Poetry and “Wounded Healing.” Charlise sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes when Ms. Brown prodded her to describe her internship with a professor of family counseling at the local community college. She beamed with excitement, however, when talking about her spoken-word poetry club for “neglected” girls and the need to take her writing to “another level.” Charlise was the most talented poet in the club and the only female artist to perform at The Answer. She had been abandoned by her mother years ago and spent her adolescent years bouncing back and forth between overburdened aunts and the foster care system.

After accepting Charlise’s invitation to attend one of their bi-monthly lunch meetings Ms. Brown warned me, “We go through a box of tissue a day.” Together, Ms. Brown, herself still reeling from the recent tragic loss of her brother to a car accident, and Charlise fostered a writing community for what Hill (2009) describes as “wounded healing”:

I use the term “wounds” to refer to those narratives of pain, suffering, and injustice that mediate an individual’s understanding and negotiation of the world;

“healing” alludes to those storytelling practices that enabled students to recognize the commonality of their experiences, gain insight into their problems, and access new ideological perspectives (p. 24).

I decided that my first meeting would be my last. I was torn between my interests in capturing the narratives and identities constructed in this female, hip-hop writing community and the ethical considerations that arose as I entered this space, not just as a spoken-word poet and former creative writing teacher, but also as a researcher and a male. Ultimately, I erred on the side of caution and asked Charlise if could participate as a “writing coach” as opposed to a full-fledged member of the club.

I observed students performing spoken-word poetry as social action on the second to last Friday of the year when the ladies performed selected pieces for the entire student body at Pick-Me-Up. Charlise, who doubled as MC of the event, got the party started with her piece, “Wrong Place, Wrong Time.” A 10th grader named Vernice unabashedly spoke about her 20 year old sister who is pregnant again and debating an abortion. Now Vernice was debating the cycle and whether she can stop it. Esther’s poem, “Tent City,” critiqued Jay-Z and former U.S. presidents for providing relief for Haiti when “we got a disaster right here.” Candice prefaced her poem, “Visions,” by talking about how her brother who was murdered as an innocent bystander at a playground basketball game seven months ago still visits her at night.

I present this as evidence of the ways Ms. Brown and Charlise used their common interests in writing and performing spoken-word, and common experiences as women in male-dominated hip-hop culture to affect change in themselves and others.

Conclusions

Even though they all considered themselves progressive educators, the insights garnered in this chapter suggest that the pedagogical possibilities for how teachers were able to use hip-hop as literary texts were linked to their respective hip-hop cultural identities. Recognizing the importance of identifying with her students, Ms. Oxley, a *no school hipopper*, sought professional development on how to add rap songs to her “mainstream-centric” (Banks, 2010) American Literature curriculum. Ms. Oxley’s contributions approaches to Nas’ “N.I.G.G.E.R.” and Tupac Shakur’s “Changes” reflected her cultural-deficit perspectives of today’s hip-hop generation, resulting in pedagogies *with* and *about* hip-hop that cast the artists as cultural heroes, but at the same time reinforced hip-hop culture’s ancillary status. Ms. Brown’s additive approaches to Tupac Shakur as poetry and pedagogies *about* notions of Black masculinity and femininity in the Black community were designed to enhance students’ performance on state-standardized tests, in addition to “change hip-hop.” While Ms. Brown’s transformational objectives were undoubtedly *culturally relevant*, her attempts to “drop knowledge” on, or more appropriately, *in* her students were generationally irrelevant in ways that echoed her nostalgic *old school* hip-hop cultural identity. Her *old school* hip-hop cultural identity did, in fact, result in social action Exhibitions that produced change in Riverfront. Although Mr. Candler possessed sophisticated content-knowledge of hip-hop and his curricular approaches to KRS-One as political text were theoretically grounded in critical pedagogy, his *out-of-school* hip-hop cultural identity contributed to his failures to establish and maintain the teacher-student relationships paramount to

maximizing Black and Latino/a students' academic achievements, cultural competencies, and critical consciousness.

Finally, as was mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, I did not observe Mr. Westland incorporate any hip-hop texts into his curriculum over the course of my five months in the field. In spite of this, *social action* and *hip-hop* best describes the *new school hipopper's* curricular approaches and pedagogical strategies. Chapter 6 is devoted in its entirety to Mr. Westland, who I conceptualize as the archetypical *hip-hop pedagogue* in the ways he combines social action curricular approaches and hip-hop methodologies to remix the power dynamics of his classroom around “pedagogies of hip-hop.”

CHAPTER SIX
MR. WESTLAND: *REAL* HIP-HOP PEDAGOGUE

“If you want teach them something over there at Temple, tell them if you want to teach a kid from the hood math you better be talking dollars. Tell the English teachers that if they can’t read Jay [Z] good luck getting them [kids from the hood] to read Shakespeare. The rules of this game are different. ‘Because I said so’ doesn’t work anymore. You gotta find or build a base of relation or they’re not going to respect you. They’re not going to trust you. Then they’re not going to understand you. Or, you’re not going to understand them, which is worse.” – Mr. Westland

Thanks to the blizzard of 2010, it had been more than a week since my introductory school visits in Riverfront. Anxieties over my first day in the field as a researcher and treacherous road conditions resulted in a restless night’s sleep and an early arrival to PHS. Going through my researcher’s checklist – pens, pads, phone off, finished cup of coffee – I heard Mr. Westland before I saw him. Trunk rattling, breaks squeaking, a gold Buick Park Avenue with two nodding heads pulled into the parking space opposite of me. Mr. Westland acknowledged my presence, “chucking a deuce,” or flashing a two-finger peace sign before opening his door and spilling Nas’ “Poison” across the teachers’ parking lot:

It’s all poison
Ecstasy, coke, you say it’s love, it is poison
Schools where I learned they should be burned, it is poison
Physicians prescriptin’ us medicine which is poison
Doctors injectin’ our infants with the poison
Religion misoverstood is poison... (Nas, 2001)

An energetic Mr. Westland, followed by Justin, a young Puerto Rican student I met on my initial visit, bounced out of the vehicle, seconding Nas’ emotion, “Schools where we learn they should be burned, it is poison.” When I inquired into Mr. Westland’s preferred source of caffeine, Justin exclaimed, “You DO NOT want to see Dub [aka Mr. Westland]

on caffeine!” Closing his trunk and securing his belongs, Mr. Westland confirmed, “I don’t need coffee as long as I got my theme music!”

The *new school hiphopper* distinguished himself from other members of the cohort in the ways he reoriented conceptions of teaching and learning, teacher-student relations, and notions of knowledge around the “values, truth claims, and subject positions” of hip-hop (Hill, 2009, p. 120). The epistemological shift in Mr. Westland’s classroom is best exemplified in the epigraph of this chapter. In “this game” – teaching English/language arts (or math for that matter) in PHS and Riverfront – Jay-Z (i.e. hip-hop), not Shakespeare, represents “the best that has been thought and said” (Arnold, 1896).

Mr. Westland frequently engaged students in pedagogies *about* hip-hop in the form of journal writings. On one occasion he asked, *What is it about Drake that makes him so popular, yet so hated?* The question was prompted by disturbing conversations we overheard pertaining to the Canadian, half-Black/half-Jewish, actor turned rapper turned singer’s rapid rise in the music industry; his sexual attractiveness, and of course, his cultural authenticity. Mr. Westland’s goal was to use Drake to revisit the “house nigga/field nigga” paradigm; how White slavemasters divided and conquered slave populations, pitting dark against light (and vice versa), and how this pathology continues to manifest itself in the Black community to this day.

Mr. Westland did not, however, integrate any hip-hop texts, Jay-Z or otherwise, into his curriculum during my stay. With that said, everything he taught, from literature like *Othello* and *A Lesson Before Dying*, to social action units on “The Achievement

Gap” and “The Financial Meltdown” was (a) mediated by a hip-hop worldview that sees schools as poison, and (b) executed with the intent to burn schools down from within.

I start this chapter by describing the ways Mr. Westland’s *new school* hip-hop cultural identity informed his beliefs about teaching English/language arts in urban public schools as “cultural work” (Giroux, 1992). From there, I outline the social action curricular approaches he employed to facilitate students’ academic achievements, cultural competencies, and critical consciousness. Finally, shifting the conversation from pedagogies *with* hip-hop and hip-hop as text to pedagogies *of* hip-hop and hip-hop as methodology, I shine a light on a collaborative reading activity called “The Capha” and the hip-hop cultural literacies central to Mr. Westland’s cultural authenticity and teaching effectiveness.

Pedagogies Of Hip-hop

Puttin(g) in (Cultural) Work

If schools are poison, I was curious to learn more about how Mr. Westland saw his role as a public school teacher. He responded accordingly:

Mr. Westland: Brotha, I’m out here putting in work! I am a teacher slash counselor, slash social worker, slash best friend, slash older brother, slash father, [pause] slash psychologist, slash relationship counselor and the list goes on and on. It’s like being a renaissance man without any of the education to do so. I know I said teacher first, but the more I do this job the more I see the disconnects between what the State technically pays me to do and what gets me out of bed in the morning.

Me: And what is it that gets you out of the bed in the morning?

Mr. Westland: I do this to better my people, my community.

“Putting in work” is a hip-hop colloquialism for “paying your dues” in a manner that goes above and beyond what is expected of you in comparison to others. Mr. Westland defined his purpose as a teacher in opposition to the State and what he termed the

“dinosaur archetype,” or teachers who understood the profession simply in terms of its technocratic and managerial responsibilities.

Mr. Westland’s ideologies on teaching echo Giroux’s (1992) notion of teaching as “cultural work.” While it could be said that all teaching is cultural work, “cultural workers” make deliberate efforts “to influence how and what knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations” (Giroux, 1992, p. 239). Central to this work in this sphere (public school), Giroux (1992) argues, is the production of narratives and identities.

Needless to say, such narratives are never neutral; they are always framed within articulations and experiences occupied by someone and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others they are always located in moral and political interests. (p. 232)

In the subsequent sections I bring to light the ways Mr. Westland’s classroom narratives reflect the moral and political interests of his students and hip-hop culture.

“**The Financial Meltdown.**” Even in the classroom, Mr. Westland was explicit in his beliefs that his purpose as a teacher, as well as that of his students, was in essence, to burn schools down from within. I witnessed a prime example of his cultural work as he and his students watched and analyzed the film, *Frontline: The Warning* as part of a unit called “The Financial Meltdown.” I captured this narrative as it came in response to a scene depicting the illogicality of laissez-faire capitalist Alan Greenspan being chairman of the United States Federal Reserve:

Sedrick: How can you be against government regulation and be fed chairman?
Mr. Westland: Excellent point. But couldn’t you say the same about me? Don’t get it twisted; the same person who pays me pays the cops that ‘F’ with us. We all have a choice to make: fight the power from outside the system or from inside. I chose inside. I’ll leave it to you decide who Greenspan was fighting for.

It was clear to me, as well as his students, who Mr. Westland was fighting for and where he got the education to do so. Here, he quotes Chuck D, appealing to the Black Nationalism of Public Enemy to signify his political stance as a *real* teacher who has infiltrated the public education system to fight the ideological, racial, and cultural “powers” operating in his classroom. However, Mr. Westland’s self-determination and anti-institutionalism should not be misconstrued as anti-intellectualism or anti-White. In this particular unit Mr. Westland’s work, or academic objectives, included introducing students to the complex financial instruments (e.g. fixed/variable rate mortgage, credit-default swaps, synthetic interest rate swaps, etc.) discussed in Matt Taibbi’s *Rolling Stone* article “Looting Main Street”; “reading” and analyzing the documentary film, *The Warning* (2009), for its perspectives on the economic and political causes of the recession; and reading and analyzing Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* (1996) for its literary and ideological significance.

Activate Prior Knowledge. Mr. Westland began the unit’s introductory lesson by posing the following questions for discussion: *What is a recession? Who is responsible?* and *How is it impacting you, your home, or your neighborhood?*

Leslie: I can’t define the word, but I know if you ain’t got the hook up, ain’t nuthin’ poppin’.

Mr. Westland: Okay, that’s a start. Ryan, you’re on Google duty today, right? Do me a favor and type *define: recession* and tell us what you get.

Ryan: It says “A period of temporary economic decline during which trade and industrial activity are reduced, generally identified by a fall in GDP dot, dot, dot.” What does GDP stand for?

Mr. Westland: Gross domestic product, we’ll define that in greater detail in a moment. Please add the term *recession* and its definition to your notes. Can anyone tell me what’s the difference between a recession and a depression? And I’m smacking anyone that says a couple of letters [shared laughter]...

With no volunteers, Mr. Westland took it upon himself to answer his own

question:

Have you ever heard people say that a recession is when your neighbor loses their job and a depression is when *you* lose your job? Basically, it comes back to this word *temporary*; recessions last for years, depressions last for decades. Real talk, there's been nothing temporary about the economic decline in [city's name], right? But all of a sudden it's a crisis when folks in [neighboring suburb] can't find a job. Once upon a time, the alkies [alcoholics] harassing you in front of [liquor store name] had respectable, good paying jobs at [name of former manufacturing plants] that kept them off the corner. All of a sudden it's a crisis when *they* [White people] need a Bridge Card [food stamps]. So, my goal is to put y'all on to the macro, or larger economic and political factors that contributed to what our President calls "the worst economic recession since the Great Depression."

The narrative above contains examples of the truth claims and subject positions central to Mr. Westland's *realness*. Just as he did in our formal interviews, Mr. Westland uses the phrase *real talk* to grab his audience's attention and emphasize the succeeding truth claim that Riverfront has been mired in an economic depression for decades. His reference to "the alkies" in front of the liquor store suggests that there is a causal relationship between the city's low rates of employment and high rates of substance abuse. Implicit in his appeals to food stamps (Bridge Card) and use of the third-person pronoun *they* is that there is nothing new, temporary, or catastrophic about the economic and social hardships *we* (poor Blacks and Latino/as) endure in this country. Mr. Westland also stressed the word *our* in a way that suggested he was skeptical of President Obama's allegiances to *us*.

Introduce New Material. Mr. Westland distributed printed copies of an article written by *Rolling Stone* magazine's political reporter, Matt Taibbi, entitled, "Looting Main Street". Taibbi uses Jefferson County, Alabama as a case study on how major financial institutions like JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs used unregulated financial

instruments, particularly interest rate swap deals on variable rate mortgages, to extract almost 3 billion dollars from a 250 million dollar sewer system project.

Holding the magazine in the air, Mr. Westland exclaimed, “This is going to be our econ[omics] textbook for the next I-don’t-know-how-long.”

The following terms were listed on the overhead projector: *oligarchy*, *predatory lending*, *fixed/variable rate mortgage*, *credit default swap*, and *synthetic interest rate swap*.

Before reading, Mr. Westland explained that he was just as confused (and disinterested) by the complex terminology and concepts as they were, and that Taibbi’s telling of Jefferson County’s story helped him to understand what was at the root of the housing crisis and broader financial meltdown of 2008.

Guided Practice. Mr. Westland led the class in a collaborative, large-group reading of the article. Students (and I), minus Ryan who was seated at a computer on “Google duty”, were arranged in a circle with Mr. Westland strategically placed at the head of the class.

Leslie was the first to respond to Mr. Westland’s prompt, “Who’d like to get the party started?” Reading confidently, Leslie’s facial expressions and tone of voice wavered when she came across the sentence: *What happened here in Jefferson County would turn out to be the perfect metaphor for the peculiar alchemy of modern oligarchical capitalism.*

Revealing that he highlighted the sentence on his own copy of the article, Mr. Westland consoled her, “I thought that might get your attention. Let’s break this down.”

After mining definitions of *peculiar* and *alchemy* from students, Mr. Westland focused his attention on *oligarchy*:

Mr. Westland: O-li-gar-chy. You tellin' me you never heard the word *oligarchy* in any of your Social Studies classes? Funny, me neither. Ryan, please type *define: o-l-i-g-a-r-c-h-y* por favor.

Ryan: The first thing that comes up is *A small group of people having control of a country, organization, or institution.*

Mr. Westland repeated the definition as he and the students added it to their notes.

Still writing, Justin wondered aloud, "I thought we lived in a democracy?"

Mr. Westland: That makes two of us! One man, one vote; a government of the people, by the people, all that ish [shit], right? What is Taibbi suggesting here?

Leslie: Is he saying that America really isn't a democracy?

Mr. Westland: Despite the fact that some of us do exercise our right to vote, and I stress some, ultimately we're at the mercy of select few. In this case, he's arguing that our economy, and in many ways our national security, lies in the hands of a few major, major, major financial institutions and the, what does he call them... *morally absent* capitalists that run them. What's our lil ole' vote worth when, as we'll see in a moment, bankers and politicians were gettin' billions, that's billions with a 'B', off of people like Lisa Pack and you and I?

There's no question that Mr. Westland "guided" practice with a heavier hand than the other members of the cohort. Clearly, Mr. Westland was using the article as more than just an economics "textbook." He was using Taibbi's liberal critique of crony capitalism to affirm the truth to his students: democracy is merely an illusion in the "gangster state" (Taibbi's words) better known as the United States of America. The corrupt politicians in D.C., Jefferson County, as well as Riverfront were not neutral. The police officers that were arrested and charged with planting evidence on dozens of unjustly convicted citizens while I was in the field were not neutral. Neither was Mr. Westland. His narratives on what kind of country America is (and isn't) made it obvious what side he was on.

Independent Practice. After class I joked with Mr. Westland that he wasn't lying when he mentioned that they would be reading Taibbi's article for "the next I-don't-know-how-long." On this day they only finished reading two of the article's six pages. Between Mr. Westland's frequent monologues and students' relatively low reading skills it would take a total of 18 1-hour sessions to complete the article, watch the 55-minute film, and read 95 pages of Rand's novella.

In our exit interview, I asked Mr. Westland to weigh the pros and cons of the PHS model, in particular students doing little independent reading or homework outside the classroom:

Is part of me trying to help them check a book off their reading bucket list? Absolutely. Ayn Rand is some heavy shit! But I'm trying to teach them *how* to read. I'm trying to put them inside my head; show them what I'm thinking and doing when I come across a word I don't know. Call it holding their hand, coddling, whatever you'd like. I'd call it compassion. I don't make any assumptions about what their previous teacher did or didn't teach them. And I certainly don't make any assumptions about their home lives or lack thereof.

Mr. Westland's beliefs about what his students needed to learn were the product of his personal experiences as the son of drug addict who was raised by a besieged grandmother and struggled mightily in school. PHS and Principal Ardmore recognized that it was in their students' best interests that Mr. Westland emphasized quality over quantity. Mr. Westland did not allow politicians, or the calendar for that matter to determine what he was teaching and how students were learning. Furthermore, because his students were his neighbors, it was in his best interests that he did his job well.

Assessments of Learning. For the final assessment, students composed multiple drafts of business letters addressed to "The Committee to Save the World" (Greenspan, Rubin, and Summers). Within the structure of the letter students demonstrated their

understandings of the impacts of deregulation on Riverfront, in addition to positive and negative examples of laissez-faire practices and Libertarian ideologies within hip-hop culture.

It was through “authentic dialogues” (Freire, 1985) of this third point where learning became *real* in students’ eyes and *culturally relevant* in mine. “True dialogue,” says Freire (1985), “unites subjects together in the cognition of a knowable object, which mediates between them” (p. 49). In Mr. Westland’s classroom the “knowable objects” of hip-hop language and worldviews served as the principle mediators of classroom discourse. Mr. Westland was willing and able to engage students in substantive and stylistic “real talk” on how egoism, or “doin’ you,” works to “undo us” – whether speaking of the “dopeboy” who feeds his family by killing yours, or the “collegeboy” who forgets where he comes from. Citing his own choice of occupation, desires for individual social mobility, and student-loan balance, he also highlighted the stresses that come with living for someone else. Real talk would emerge as the hip-hop pedagogy most effective in decentering hegemonic conceptions of the teacher-student relationship and notions of knowledge.

“The Achievement Gap.” Perhaps the best example of Mr. Westland’s hip-hop cultural work was his unit, “The Achievement Gap.” On this particular March morning the lesson involved real talks based on the numerical and demographic data contained in the [State] School Report Card.

I asked Mr. Westland if this was a school-wide initiative while 11th graders were actually taking the test, to which he replied:

No. We do this once or twice a week. I will not teach to the test – I’m trying to change mindsets. But in a class focused on the written and spoken-word, cats need to understand the power of statistics as tools of manipulation.

All of the Black teachers in the cohort spoke openly of the cultural aspects of their teaching labor. *Old school* and *no school hiphoppers*’ curricular approaches sought to reform hip-hop culture in their respective nostalgic and conservative visions. Mr. Westland, seeing the politics of education through the “youthful” eyes, looked to transform virtually all aspects of schooling to reflect the “values, truth claims, and subject positions” of his students. Ms. Oxley admitted betraying her values; selling her students an American Dream that she herself knew was “bullshit.” Mr. Westland refused to “teach to the test.” Instead, he taught *about* the test, taking a social action approach to reading state school report cards. Through narratives that exposed the truths behind the politics of accountability and the ghetto, he motivated his students to use the test to prove the “haters” in the state capitol, and hood, wrong.

The guiding question listed on the whiteboard read: *What do the stats say about us?*

Mr. Westland: According to the spreadsheet, 63% of economically disadvantaged students scored below proficient in language arts. Now look at non-economically disadvantaged. Only 16% scored below proficient. 57% of African-Americans in the state scored below proficient. How does that make you feel hearing and reading this?

Leslie: I’m embarrassed as hell!

Gabi: Are they predicting that we’ll fail?

Carl: I’m predicting we’ll fail [laughter from students, disgust on Westland’s face].

Leslie: He tryin to put y’all on...

Mr. Westland: Thanks Leslie, but this is exactly why we’re looking at this. Think about what the politicians in [state capitol] say about us down here. Look at [neighboring suburb’s] scores... Right next door and white folks killin’ us! Thanks to our residential hater over here [glaring at Carl] you see the other dangerous side to this story. How we have internalized the “Nigga” [making air quotes with his hands] mindset and what the stats and white folks say about us

[Carl's eyes begin to roll]. Why do we take so much pride in being ignorant? What is positive about ¾ of Black and Latino brothas and sistas in [state] not knowing 10th grade math? It's not about you, it's about US!

Mr. Westland served as both a cultural worker and public intellectual as he taught students to read the “word” – statistical data on state school report cards – and the “world” – a society where low educational attainment is used by Conservatives (and some Whites) to deflect institutional racism. Teacher and students directly addressed racial and economic inequalities, the narrow definitions of academic achievement assessed by standardized tests, and, as seen with Carl, the reproductive identities and behaviors exhibited by the hip-hop generations through real talks. After conducting further research on the disparities in funding and test scores across the state students served as public intellectuals, creating PowerPoint presentations that put the rest of the student body on to their findings in “Pick-Me-Up.”

There were days, lessons, and moments in Mr. Westland's classroom where the stakes were higher than right or wrong, even pass or fail, and Mr. Westland's practices and behaviors intensified accordingly. As he stated, “I didn't sign up for this to get kids to college. I do this to better my community.” He spoke from his gut without the slightest hesitation in his use of the words *White folks* or *Nigga*. Nor did he hold back from calling Carl out as an example of the problem. He drew clear lines in the sand of us versus them. Sometimes ‘them’ were White, wealthy, and Republican, and subsequently he helped students to develop the necessary critical reading and thinking skills to discern those threats. But more often than not ‘them’ was in fact ‘us,’ and he made it a point to expose the less conspicuous enemies within the race, culture, and community, even if they were

in the room. Of course, these literacies would not be assessed on the state standardized test, but as Mr. Westland put it, “they get tested on this real shit everyday.”

Real Teacher-Student Relationships. Mr. Westland’s effectiveness in meeting students’ academic and socio-cultural needs was a manifestation of his biological and political “youth,” and his willingness and ability to form authentic relationships that challenged conventional notions of teacher and student.

At what would be the final stop on my introductory tour, Principal Ardmore led me through the dimly lit labyrinth that is PHS to see Mr. Westland in action. Principal Ardmore picked an opportune time to ask if Leslie, a model-student and ambassador for PHS, could be excused for a moment. We exchanged pleasantries before he asked her if there was anything future teachers could gain from watching Mr. Westland. She took a second to gather her thoughts and stated:

There’s Mr. Westland and there’s Dub [short for ‘W’]. Mr. Westland don’t play; he a smart dude and he pushes us really hard. But then there’s Dub. Dub got jokes, but *he don’t BS us*. He treats us more like his little brothers and sisters than his students.

In hip-hop, re- or self-naming is a “form of reinvention and self-definition” (Rose, 1994, p. 36). As a kid who dreaded the first day of school or having a substitute teacher where my classmates would be reminded that my first name is Harry, naming myself *Golden Child* was illustrative of the confidence and consciousness I found in hip-hop and college. In this case, Mr. Westland’s renaming is symbolic of how the power dynamics of the teacher-student relationship had been reinvented and redefined.

My observations confirm that students referred to him as “Dub” as much, if not more than his “government name.” When I inquired into his feelings about shunning the “Mr.” and the messages it sends he said:

My attitude toward students is always going to be professional, but it's not my degrees or the monkey-suit that earns me respect in their eyes. The more my students know about [participant's first name] the man, the nigga from [housing project name], the more they'll come to respect and trust Mr. [last name] the teacher. The more they'll realize that they're one in the same.

Mr. Westland's renaming typifies the "humility rather than arrogance" (Freire, 1998, p. 94) that was so endearing in the hearts and minds of Leslie and her classmates. Moreover, it speaks to how relations between teacher and student were reoriented around pedagogies of hip-hop. Mr. Westland established and maintained authority in the classroom, not by evoking superficial titles, his age, or academic credentials; but through the coherence of his words and actions – his realness.

Both a cliché as well as a truism, realness "... has to do with behaving in a way that does not contradict the ideals you stand for and the ones you sing about " (Dyson, 2007, p. 10). Mr. Westland showed, and more importantly, proved his genuine interests in students before, during, and after the bells. The self-proclaimed "teacher slash counselor, slash social worker, slash best friend, slash older brother, slash father, slash psychologist, slash relationship counselor" provided extraordinary physical and emotional access to his students. Virtually no topic or space – his car, his lunch hour, or his heart – was off limits.

I can testify on Leslie's behalf that Mr. Westland did not *BS* his students or I:

I can't sit here and say that "I talk this" [imitating "White" voice], because I don't. Yes, I know how to speak proper English. But I also know how hard it is to learn proper English when your mother is a high school dropout on top of a heroin addict and your teacher blames *you* for not knowing how to speak proper English. Naw mean!?

He grew up in the M.C. where "cash rules everything around me (us)." He attended these schools where *Water Not For Human Consumption* signs still adorn sinks and water

fountains in the year 2010. Above all else, Dub was a reliable source; living, breathing evidence of the intrinsic and extrinsic values of education, and that success in school does not require conceding one's "honour and life" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 194).

When Keepin' It Real Goes Wrong? "When keepin' it real goes wrong" was the title of a reoccurring sketch on *Chappelle's Show* that offers cautionary tales depicting instances when individuals' efforts to prove the coherence of their words and actions has unintended negative consequences. Upon reflection of Mr. Westland's truth telling, especially the colorful, not to mention racially-charged language employed in real talks, I called on Dave Chappelle for assistance in our exit interview.

Me: Has keepin' it real ever gone wrong?

Mr. Westland: As far as me speaking to my students from the heart, when I'm telling them this is what it is, you need to listen, it's always received well because I'm coming from a real place.

Me: I'd have to admit that you sometimes use language and go places that a lot of my students, even other teachers in the building, either wouldn't or couldn't go.

Mr. Westland: Most definitely, most definitely. In the very simplest terms, I can relate to my students because I know their language and their world. I know how to command their attention, how to say things in a certain way that they can make direct connections. Sometimes profanity will do that, "Sit your ass down!" It's more emphatic and indicates that this isn't a time for nonsense or bullshit. For students like [Justin] and [Leslie] who can easily be frustrated with all the haters trying to hold them back, calling a spade a spade builds trust because they know I got their back. And when they know I'm willing to put my own ass on the line, they're more prone to take similar risks.

I did see one instance where taking a curricular risk, showing a clip from *The Boondocks* to activate prior knowledge for a lesson on persuasive essays, almost backfired on him. Mr. Kubiak, a White, male physical education and health teacher beyond his fifties, happened to pass through just as R. Kelly bellowed, "I'm gonna piss on you!" at the top of his lungs. I watched as the gentleman stopped dead in his tracks before breathing hard and hurrying in the direction of the office.

About five minutes before the end of class, Principal Ardmore entered looking more annoyed than concerned.

“I trust you were doing something constructive with this material?” he said.

Mr. Westland turned to Sedrick, “What did you learn from that episode?”

He replied, “Oh yeah, we learned about how even though the criminal justice system is racist, green is more important than Black and White.”

Mr. Westland pivoted 180-degrees in his swivel chair, “Leslie, what did you learn today?”

She answered, “I learned that honestly, rich or poor, famous or not, people do messed up stuff. But, at the end of the day they’re our brothers and sisters and we gotta love ‘em any way.”

Principal Ardmore spun on the heels of his dress shoes and exited the classroom without saying another word.

Mr. Westland cleaned his desk and packed his bag with considerably more fury than usual on this afternoon. Not because he got caught committing “English teacher blasphemy” – but because his co-worker’s first inclination was to tell on him:

See what I’m saying? Was there a method behind it? Of course! In a classroom full of 15 year-old girls with 20 year-old boyfriends, how many essays you think I’m gonna get tomorrow on the pros and cons of statutory rape laws? What, it makes me less of a teacher because I used the greatest R & B singer-slash-pervert in the world and the satire of Aaron McGruder, a hiphopper mind you, to improve my students writing and critical thinking skills? I’m not passing up an opportunity to do that. I’m not! And neither would [Principal Ardmore].

Mr. Kubiak saw the madness – kids watching a controversial “adult” cartoon in class – not the method. He did not stick around long enough to see the conversation that ensued around R. Kelly, the deplorable sexual abuse crimes he was accused of, and the Black

community's propensities for turning a blind eye towards such matters. He did not stick around long enough to see Mr. Westland help students decipher the state's legal definitions for statutory rape ("Sexual assault is sexual penetration with a victim between age 13 and 16 when the actor is at least four years older"). Nor did he see the enthusiasm on students' faces as they turned to their notebooks to craft their respective essays. Ironically, what he believed the students should have been doing in the first place.

This passage is evidence of the ways Mr. Westland's conceptions of teaching and learning reflect his *new school* hip-hop cultural identity. His cultural work as a Black male public school teacher of the hip-hop generation was rooted in "pedagogies of hip-hop," namely truth claims that teachers of the "dinosaur archetype," "dead, old White guy"-English/language arts curriculum, and color-blind ideologies of "high-stakes" education do not have the academic, cultural, or political interests of urban youth at heart. Authentic dialogues, or in the hip-hop cultural tradition, "real talks," served to restructure the power dynamics of the teacher-student relationship around "their language and their world." And as seen in his pedagogies *with The Boondocks* and *about R. Kelly*, the *new school hipopper* placed primacy on enhancing students' cultural competencies and critical consciousness, specifically the hypocrisies of a legal system *and culture* that allow sexual crimes against Black women (and in this case, Black children) to go unpunished.

From Hip-hop as Text to Hip-hop as Methodology

Like hip-hop, Mr. Westland's pedagogy was both conscious and subliminal, art and vandalism, Black and multicultural. Mr. Westland was deliberate in making social

action curricular interventions that responded to the socio-cultural, as well as academic needs of his students.

Take, for instance, his response to my question concerning his motivations for his unit on *Othello*:

Why Othello? Because I think of Shakespeare's body of work it's the most relevant to my students. What is it about? It's about an outsider [making airquotes], right? A strong, powerful Black man in a place and time where strong, powerful Black men were unheard of. And what happens to him? His friends turn to foes, his girl turns into a hoe [shared laughter], at least that's what he's lead to believe, and his whole world comes crashing down on top of him. So what was that? White people conspiring to take down a powerful Black man, they can relate to that. Jealous, backbiting bitches like Iago, they can definitely relate to that.

Even at the risk of committing "English teacher blasphemy," students only "read" Acts 1 and 5 of the play. Mr. Westland supplemented the written text with the 1965 film starring Laurence Olivier for Act 2, and the 2001 remake, *O*, featuring Mekhi Phifer for Acts 3 and 4.

"The text is just a means to an end," said Mr. Westland.

The ends, according to the learning objectives listed on the whiteboard over the course of the 3-week unit, ventured beyond *read(ing) and analyz(ing) Shakespeare* to also include *demystify(ing) Shakespearean literature; understand(ing) the history of the Moors; and connect(ing) our understandings of Shakespeare and the Moors to our own lives*.

Sarcastically sampling President George W. Bush in our exit interview, Mr. Westland was adamant that his approach should not be mistaken as the "soft bigotry of low expectations":

Look, I know better than anyone the dire need to expose students to the likes of Shakespeare. I don't know whether they'll remember the plot twist in Act 1 Scene whatever. I do know they'll think twice anytime they see a White actor in Black

face. They will most definitely walk out of here knowing who the Moors were and the impact they had on the world. They'll walk out of here questioning why this part of history [African and Muslim conquest of Europe] isn't talked about. And hopefully, if I've done my job right, they'll have a greater appreciation for Shakespeare telling this story how he did and when he did.

Based on his own reflections of his *miseducation* in Riverfront and the struggles and successes he experienced in college, Mr. Westland was very aware of the functional necessity to teach his students canonical literature. Those same experiences taught him that the appreciation of Shakespeare must first begin with “cogenerative dialogues” (Emdin, 2009) acknowledging and redressing students’ negative experiences reading “dead, old White guys.” Furthermore, it required critical analysis of how White guys (dead and alive) construct notions of knowledge that narrowly define “classic” and marginalize certain chapters in history.

The play’s themes of honor, isolation, and xenophobia are multicultural in the ways they transcend race, place, and time. However, Mr. Westland’s pedagogies were *hip-hop* in the ways he framed *Othello* as a cautionary tale for his Black and Latino/a students seeking position in a country not their own. He outed his own fears of the racial ‘other’ as a teenager and how going to an HBCU gave him the skills, knowledge, and confidence to succeed in that other world. He engaged students in real talks on the trappings of honor, eliciting examples where earning or maintaining respect lead to the principal’s office, or much worse.

The (Reading) Caph

As was previously noted in Chapter 2, this study is particularly interested in how English/language arts teachers employ *hip-hop methodologies*, or the “ways of doing”

specific to hip-hop culture, as pedagogical tools. In hip-hop, the term *cipher* is most commonly used to describe a circle of freestyling MCs who play off one another's rhymes. The term comes from the Supreme Mathematics lessons of the Five Percent Nation (Miyakawa, 2005), an off-shoot of the Nation of Islam. Symbolized by the number 0, cipher represents a whole – 360 degrees of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

In Mr. Westland's classroom "The Cipa" was a reoccurring, large-group, collaborative reading activity. Armed with *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines, Jr., and their notebooks, students pushed their desks aside and arranged themselves in a circle. By the time I joined their community in late January the protocols had long been established:

1. Whether one sentence or one page, The Cipa is not complete unless everyone is willing to take the risk to read.
2. Students must "share the mic" and respect the different reading abilities and perspectives of their classmates.
3. Students must stay "on beat," or on task, at all times.

Drawn from my participant-observations of The Cipa, this section identifies and elucidates the cultural literacies that made Dub's "ways of doing" quintessentially hip-hop.

Hip-hop Literacies. *Narrativizing and Signifying*. In the succeeding passage, Hill (2008) makes an important distinction between critical and hip-hop literacies:

While critical literacy posits that the reader's worldview necessarily mediates his or her reading of a text, hip-hop literacy advocates the use of the rhetorical and narrative strategies of the hip-hop community, which are deeply rooted in the African-American oral and literary traditions in order to foreground the values and perspectives of the hip-hop community. These strategies include *signifyin(g) and narrativizing* (p. 142).

Just as MCs serve as the conduits between the music and the crowd, Mr. Westland's primary function in The Caph was "mastering the ceremony" between the text and students. He created his own notebook on the whiteboard to model active reading/notetaking strategies for students. Similar to Rice (2003), he directed students to do "30-second freestyles" to interpret the author's use of figurative language. Other times students freestyled their predictions for how internal and external conflicts within and between characters would be resolved. No further directions were necessary; he just started beatboxing a remix of the theme song from *Jeopardy* and students took to their notebooks.

I asked Mr. Westland how and where this started:

I was looking for a way to get them to take risks when analyzing texts. What's a freestyle? It's rhyming off the top of the top of the dome. Like you're naked almost. Sometimes it's on point. Sometimes it's rough and indiscernible. My point is that we can learn from both.

The same was true when it came to students reading aloud. Mr. Westland only corrected students when their mispronunciations distorted the meaning of the text. More importantly, he fostered a safe space where students felt comfortable exposing their weaknesses, and strengths, as readers. In our interviews, as well as in class, Mr. Westland and I shared our shame in "dumbing down" to appease peers – former "best friends" now long out of sight. Conscious of the defense mechanisms students employ to save face, he made it a point to confront anti-intellectualism head on. Stronger readers such as Justin, Leslie, Sedrick, and TJ were empowered as Mr. Westland and their classmates looked to them to do a greater proportion of the reading. While he made it absolutely clear that "freeloaders" and "crabs" (a la crabs-in-a-bucket) would not be tolerated, Mr. Westland provided opportunities for less confident and/or more resistant readers to make important

contributions to The Cipha. Carl and Sheonna were two of the loudest crabs in The Cipha, yet they frequently offered valuable insight during real talks. Lewis, Ryan, and Gabi dreaded when it was their turn to read, but really enjoyed conducting Internet research in the role of “Google Man,” especially when it came to proving Mr. Westland wrong.

Whether here with Gaines, or with Rand and Taibbi, and especially with Shakespeare, there was always two stories being told: one by the author and another by Mr. Westland. He yelled, “pause” on what seemed like every other sentence to stop The Cipha and contextualize a given reference or exchange. Students did not understand credit default swaps as explained by Taibbi; but they did understand after Mr. Westland explained them in terms of a bookie or casino that makes money off a bet regardless of whether or not they win or lose. Students struggled to decode Shakespeare’s language, but they knew ten Iagos at church, and were captivated by the plot twists untangled in Mr. Westland’s retelling as a “ghetto soap opera.”

Signifying, “the trope of tropes” (Gates, 1989, p. 21) in African-American literary traditions was at the heart of Mr. Westland’s narrative strategies. I turn to Mitchell-Kernan’s (1972/1999) article, “Signifying, Loud-Talking and Marking” for a working definition:

The black concept of signifying incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meaning or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. Complimentary remarks may be delivered in a left-hand fashion. A particular utterance may be an insult in one context and not another. What pretends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. The hearer is thus constrained to attend to all potential meaning-carrying symbolic systems in speech events – the total universe of discourse. The context embeddedness of meaning is attested to by both our reliance on the given context and, most important, by our inclination to construct additional context from our background knowledge of the world. Facial expression and tone of voice

serve to orient us to one kind of interpretation rather than another. Situations context helps us to narrow meaning. Personal background knowledge about the speaker points us in different directions. Expectations based on role or status criteria enter into the sorting process. In fact, we seem to process all manner of information against a background of assumptions and expectations. (p. 311)

I present the following examples of narrativizing and signifyin(g) that emerged from a conversation about Grant, the protagonist and narrator of *A Lesson Before Dying*, as he lamented his friend Jefferson's imminent execution and times (pre-migration) and places (The South) where life seemed simpler:

Gabi: What's ragball?

Mr. Westland: Here's an example of how some things don't change: Black folks making something out of nothing. They couldn't afford a baseball or a bat, but was that gonna stop them from playing America's pastime? No. So they invented their own pastime. Can you think of any other examples of our ghetto engineering?

Carl: We used to hoop in a milk crate.

Leslie: What about poppin' the fire hydrant?

Mr. Westland: Right, ain't no swimming pool or sprinklers in the hood, we'll make one in the middle of the street.

Justin: Right in front of the police – What?! What?!

Mr. Westland: You ever think about soul food?

Lewis: Don't play with me like that Dub...

Mr. Westland: You're right, it's clear some of us been doin' a lot more than thinkin' about it lately [shared laughter as the 6'4'' 260 pound offensive tackle pats his proportionately large belly]. But really... ribs, chitterlings, grits... The African-American slave invented all that stuff from the master's scraps. That's what we do: make something out of nothing.

Mr. Westland's prompt, *Can you think of any other examples of our ghetto engineering?* is a figurative and rhetorical reference to African-American cultural practices. On one hand, the concept of "ghetto engineering" is almost oxymoronic. What, if anything, remotely genius has been manufactured by a people and a place synonymous with ignorance and consumption? On the other, engineering describes both the ingenuity and skilled-labor demonstrated by and demanded of African-Americans, past and present, to make a life "out of nothing."

This passage also reveals the rapport that had been developed in The Cipa. Family can say things to one another that strangers cannot. Gabi trusted Mr. Westland and her classmates enough to expose her limited background knowledge of ragball (baseball). Similarly, Lewis, a 6'4" 260-pound Division 1 football prospect, trusted Mr. Westland enough to know that his "left-handed" insult about his weight was coming from a "real place."

Despite Gabi's limited background knowledge of ragball, she was very familiar with "ghetto games," laughing at the police's expense, and soul food. As Gaines tells the story of African-Americans' internal and external struggles to know and maintain their racial/cultural identities in the industrialized North and segregated South during the 1940s, Mr. Westland told a more real and relevant story set in a *de*industrialized and *re*segregated Riverfront. A story he made clear when responding to Carl's question: *Why we keep reading books about the old days?*

Because I'm trying to show you how much things have changed for us... and how some things, like ignorant Negroes getting locked up, haven't changed at all. These folks weren't stupid; they were ignorant and they unconsciously exhibit an inferiority complex. That's why y'all behind... because some teacher assumed you were incapable. Assumed you were destined for jail or the grave. Some things haven't changed. Like when many of you put on fronts that WILL lead you down the same paths as Jefferson. Some things haven't changed at all.

To Mr. Westland's first point, much has changed since the days of Grant and Jefferson. Jim Crow is dead. A Black man named Barack Hussein Obama holds the highest office in the land. Then again, some things haven't changed at all. On numerous occasions he sampled KRS-One, intentionally misspeaking *overseer* instead of *officer*. Today, still, the actions of one individual calls into question the will and intelligence of the entire Black

community. Worst of all, an alarming number of Black and Latino men still experience incarceration before they experience *real* education.

“Making something out of nothing,” what Dyson (2004) describes as “improvisational intentionality,” is not only a central trope of Black consciousness and culture, but also of Mr. Westland’s hip-hop pedagogies. Much of Mr. Westland’s effectiveness in meeting the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy could be attributed to his ability as a teacher to freestyle. Descending from the extemporal music traditions of Blues and Jazz, “freestyle” describes when a “MC pulls lyrical rifts and cadences from an ever-evolving repertoire in order to perform spontaneous rhymes that reflect their immediate environment and/or address the present opponent” (Peterson, 2006, p. 359). Although Mr. Westland placed primacy on socio-cultural objectives when making curricular selections, the individual, transformative teachable moments were entirely unscripted. In the passages cited above, Mr. Westland took Gabi’s random question about a relatively trivial plot detail and used real talk to identify the connections between the cultural practices of the plantation and the projects. Then he emphasized the agentive and reproductive consequences of said practices within larger historical and political contexts.

In hip-hop, the ability to freestyle is a primary benchmark of aesthetic authenticity used to separate the MC from the rapper, the conscious from the commercial, the real from the fake. As we have learned from the varying successes and failures of Mr. Candler and Mr. Westland, in “this game,” the ability to freestyle, responding both stylistically (signifyin(g)) and substantively (narrativizing) to unforeseeable moments, texts, discourses, and topics, is imperative to maximizing student outcomes.

Summary. In my estimation, Mr. Westland’s practices and behaviors provide the *realest*, most authentic examples of hip-hop pedagogies. Symbolically represented by the title of his “theme music,” the *hip-hop pedagogue* viewed school as poison, and teaching as hip-hop cultural work. In units like “The Achievement Gap” and “The Financial Meltdown” he embarked on social action curricular interventions designed to expose and fight the ideological, racial, and cultural powers threatening his students and his culture. Mr. Westland’s pedagogies *with* and *about*, as Carl put it, “books about the old days” (*Othello and A Lesson Before Dying*), were *hip-hop* in the ways he narrativized canonical texts as cautionary tales for Black and Latino/a youth seeking position in a country not their own. Finally, through my reconstruction of The (Reading) Cipa we see how Dub consciously and subliminally used hip-hop methodologies and literacies to foreground the “unique knowledge claims, aesthetic practices, and habits of mind and body that are indigenous to hip-hop culture” (Hill, 2009, p. 121).

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the first chapter of this study, I made the case that the methodological and theoretical shortcomings of hip-hop based education (HHBE) research demanded a more expansive and penetrative ethnographic study that examined the intersections between non-researching teachers' cultural identities, hip-hop based curricular interventions, and pedagogical strategies. This argument was motivated by a desire to explore and understand the practices, behaviors, and identities of a sample population of "hip-hop based educators" that better represents the demographics of the current urban teacher workforce. Throughout this study, I have worked to fill these voids by unpacking the instructional and relational nuances, as well as complex cultural-politics of HHBE, not merely for "theory's sake," but to help identify (and ultimately impart) the beliefs about teaching, social relations, and knowledge construction processes central to cohort members' effectiveness with minority students.

Grounded in theories of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and hip-hop pedagogies (Hill, 2009), I entered the fields of PHS and 4A with three research questions in mind:

1. What are the teaching practices and behaviors of a cohort of hip-hop based educators?
2. In what ways do these practices and behaviors reflect or not reflect hip-hop pedagogies?
3. How is the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies impacted by participants' cultural identities?

In this final chapter, I offer answers to these research questions, as well as discuss the implications of the study's findings for the fields of hip-hop studies, critical multicultural teacher education, and English/language arts Education.

Conclusions

Teaching Practices and Behaviors

Members of the cohort evidenced a wide range of conceptions of self and other, structure of teacher-student relations, and notions of (cultural and canonical) knowledge. Ms. Brown described her purpose as being an “agent of change.” Mr. Westland believes on teaching reflect notions of teaching as hip-hop “cultural work” (Giroux, 1992). Through his appeals to Freire, Dewey, and critical pedagogy tradition, Mr. Candler conceptualized teaching as human, intellectual labor. Ms. Oxley, a self-described “teacher of English,” explained her purpose as an educator in technocratic terms.

Seeing herself as a service-provider – “like the mailman” – Ms. Oxley saw her students as her clients. Her goals were not to build a learning community, but rather “deliver” thinking individuals. Ms. Brown, on the other hand, saw her students as “her kids”; and herself as an “othermother” (Collins, 1991) individually responsible for her students’ academic and social successes and failures in and out of school. According to Leslie, a 10th grader in Mr. Westland’s class, he treated his students “more like his little brothers and sisters than his students.” Starting with his re-naming as “Dub,” I observed *real* teacher-student relationships structured around hip-hop cultural literacies that encouraged collaboration and community. Mr. Candler, on the other hand, struggled to establish and maintain fluid teacher-student relationships and demonstrate a connectedness with all of his students. Mr. Candler was sympathetic to and knowledgeable of the cultural-political *substance* of “real talk”; but for those very reasons was unwilling and unable to perform the discursive *styles* of “real talk” exhibited by the Black teachers in the cohort.

In terms of teachers' notions of knowledge, Mr. Candler romanticized hip-hop as a quintessentially Black and progressive cultural and political space. As such, he regarded hip-hop music and videos as political texts relevant to the "primary experiences" (Dewey, 1925) of his Black and Latino/a students. Nostalgic for the "good ole days" when hip-hop was about "peace, love, unity and having fun," Ms. Brown drew high brow/low brow distinctions between "classic" old school hip-hop and contemporary rap music. A performing spoken-word poet, Ms. Brown canonized old school and/or "conscious" hip-hop music as poetic texts worthy of literary and cultural analysis. Conversely, Ms. Oxley viewed hip-hop (and her students) through cultural-deficit paradigms. When taken into consideration with her technocratic beliefs about teaching, it became clear that Ms. Oxley did not see the intellectual merits of rap music furthering her pragmatic academic or socio-cultural objectives. Mr. Westland defined hip-hop as a "youthful identity" or "being" (Hall, 1996) shared among the "children of crack and rap." While Mr. Westland and his students did not read any hip-hop texts, their critical analysis of state report cards and the political discourses surrounding them were mediated by their common subject positions as survivors of the M.C. So, too, were their readings of "traditional" literature, magazine articles, and documentary films designed to learn about how Libertarian ideologies contributed to the current economic recession.

Hip-hop Pedagogies: The Peoples' Vocation *and* Culturally Relevant "Banking"

The findings of this study suggest that all hip-hop pedagogies, like hip-hop cultural identities, are not purely progressive. As was illustrated in Chapter 5, Ms. Oxley (and I) inserted songs by Tupac Shakur and Nas into her unit on the Harlem Renaissance

to discuss hip-hop's contributions to "mainstream" and Black culture. Her curricular approach to hip-hop as a "hook" was part of a broader pedagogical project that sought to scaffold this "degenerate generation" of Black and Latino/a students to *real* American Literature and Black culture like that of the Harlem Renaissance.

Ms. Brown's curricular approach to Tupac Shakur as poetry aspired to transform both English/language arts curriculum, as well as hip-hop culture. Unfortunately, Ms. Brown's pedagogies *about* hip-hop attempted to "deposit" traditional Black masculine and feminine identities into her students. Ultimately, her integration of hip-hop texts was additive, as the high-stakes associated with her students' performance on standardized assessments overwhelmed her ambitions for social action.

Mr. Candler's pedagogies *with* hip-hop texts were theoretically grounded in the tenets of critical pedagogy and designed to interrogate the purpose of education for Black and Latino/a youth in Riverfront. Although his curricular approaches to KRS-One as political texts were transformative, he resisted engaging in pedagogies *about* hip-hop where he was called upon to assert his authority in discourses on Black cultural-politics.

In Chapter 6 I argued that Mr. Westland catalyzes an important shift from hip-hop as text and pedagogies *with* hip-hop to hip-hop as a methodology and pedagogies *of* hip-hop. Mr. Westland's curricular approaches may not have been hip-hop based per se, but his pedagogy undoubtedly was. Mr. Westland curricular interventions and pedagogical strategies were shaped by the "values, truth claims, and subject positions" or "pedagogies *of* hip-hop" (Hill, 2009, p. 120). For Nas, and subsequently Mr. Westland and his students, schools are poison and should be burned, or radically transformed, from within. This transformation began with the creation and implementation of a collaborative

reading activity known as “The (Reading) Cipa” and “freestyle” writing exercises. The transformation was expedited by his unconscious use of hip-hop cultural literacies (narrativizing and signifying) that entrenched hip-hop as the epistemological and ontological foundations of the learning community. In doing so, Mr. Westland reinforces Ladson-Billings’ (1994) argument that teacher effectiveness and minority student achievement is located in *how* we teach, more so than *what* we teach.

Hip-hop Cultural Identity and Effectiveness

As was described in Chapter 2, teachers must satisfy all three learning objectives – academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness – to be designated *culturally relevant*. Ms. Oxley’s academic achievements included composing expository essays on hip-hop’s contributions to American and Black literature and culture. For their final assessment students created projects or performances based on the Harlem Renaissance’s themes of self-realization, self-determination (Black Nationalism), and capturing the tragedy and happiness of Black (and Brown) life. The *no school hip hopper* did not possess the content-knowledge of hip-hop music to enhance her students’ hip-hop cultural competencies, specifically the incongruencies of Black Nationalist ideologies in contemporary hip-hop music and culture. As the singular, “rich” expert in the classroom, she did work to show her students what *real*, i.e. middle-class, Black culture (and literature) looks and sounds like. Again, as an “objective” public servant and content-specialist, she refrained from engaging students in critical analysis or dialogue on the structural inequalities that help to explain the unrelenting, disproportionate tragedies endured by Black and Latino/a youth in cities like Riverfront.

For these reasons, Ms. Oxley's conservative, *no school* hip-hop pedagogies do not merit the distinction of *culturally relevant*.

Ms. Brown's academic achievements consisted of composing expository essays in preparation for the state standardized exam. The *old school hiphopper* made her desires for cultural change explicit for her students and I. These hip-hop cultural competencies included "what it means to be a (Black) man or woman," the double-edge sword of Thug Life, and the Bitch/Queen complex.

There is no disputing that the texts and topics at the core of Ms. Brown's unit increased students' participation in and identification with test preparation activities. It is worth repeating that 8 of 11 of Ms. Brown's 11th grade students passed the reading portion of the exam on their first trial (the other 3 did successfully pass their second trial). Nevertheless, Ms. Brown failed to meet the criterion of *culturally relevant* because she did not enhance students' critical consciousness of the issues of power related to standardized exams as assessments of effective teaching and student achievement.

Mr. Candler's academic achievements entailed identifying Aristotle's rhetorical devices and applying them to the composition of persuasive essays. Reflective of his Ivy League teacher education, Mr. Candler emphasized critical learning objectives more than any other member of the cohort. As seen in the title of his unit, he guided students in questioning the purpose of education for Black and Latino/a youth. To his own admission, he should have pushed students to consider what, if any, contemporary rappers serve as teachers (like KRS-One).

Mr. Candler's curriculum was culturally relevant; however, his pedagogy, in particular the social relations in his classroom, was not. Constructing hip-hop as a "Black

thang,” the *out-of-school hiphopper* believed he was doing the right thing, respectfully “playing his position” as a White person in Black spaces (Riverfront and hip-hop), by not narrativizing his Black students on who they were, who they are, or who they should be. Although he possessed the content-knowledge of hip-hop, technological know-how, and political will to make transformative hip-hop based curricular interventions, he lacked what Howard (2001) describes as the “culturally consistent communicative competencies” to show and prove his “otherness” as a White teacher to his students

The following academic achievements materialized from Mr. Westland and “The (Reading) Cipa”: students composed business letters (“A Lesson Before Living” and “Dear Committee to Save the World”), translated *Othello* into “ghetto soap operas,” and presented PowerPoints on the achievement gap to the entire PHS community. Despite not integrating any hip-hop texts into his curriculum, Mr. Westland’s pedagogies *about* hip-hop produced the most frequent incidences of hip-hop cultural competences. I witnessed the *new school hiphopper* explicate the connections between the cultural practices of the plantation and the projects; the challenges of, as Tupac described, being poor and Black (or Brown) in this “White Man’s World”; Drake, cultural authenticity, and the house nigga/field nigga paradigm; and “haters,” or anti-intellectualism in hip-hop and Riverfront. His social action curricular interventions were designed to improve students’ critical consciousness of Eurocentric literature and history’s “misplacement” of the Moors; laissez-faire practices and Libertarian ideology in D.C. and Wall Street, as well as Riverfront; and the high political stakes of standardized testing in their state.

Through his cultural work to “fight the power(s)” inside school and commitment to “English teacher blasphemy,” Mr. Westland provided the *realest*, most effective

examples of *culturally relevant* hip-hop pedagogy. The cultural competencies attempted and/or accomplished by the older Black female teachers in the cohort were fueled by outrage and directed toward *reforming* hip-hop in their respective conservative or nostalgic visions. Mr. Westland, seeing teaching through “youthful” eyes, strived to *transform* school – what counts as learning, curriculum, communicative practices, and physical learning environment – to reflect he and his students’ collective experiences of marginalization in school and society. Both teachers that self-identified as hiphoppers on the participant questionnaire (Ms. Brown and Mr. Westland) wanted to make students “think like they thought.” Partly due to his age, but more so because of his psychological, political, and cultural proximity to the ghetto and hip-hop, Mr. Westland’s “thoughts” were more closely aligned with his students (and Hill) than the other members of the cohort.

Implications

The Four Cornerstones of HHBE

Urban teacher education programs and school systems should consider developing courses and/or professional development sequences that teach pre-service and in-service educators and administrators the history, aesthetics, content, and pedagogies of hip-hop – what I have termed as “the four cornerstones of HHBE.” Study findings illustrate that basic understandings of the structural and cultural origins of hip-hop and political-economics of post-Civil Rights Era urban America are prerequisites for discerning the aesthetics and content of hip-hop. With this socio-cultural foundation, teachers can better appreciate the beauty (or lack thereof) of hip-hop artforms and the inquiry processes and human responses they produce. Upon mastering the styles of hip-

hop, teachers can make informed decisions regarding the literary, poetic, and/or political content of hip-hop texts. Knowing where hip-hop comes from, the various shades and subtleties of its cultural products, and where hip-hop is going (for better or for worse), then, and only then can teachers begin to tap the radical possibilities of hip-hop pedagogies.

Thus, it seems the question of “*who* are we teaching” must be asked and answered by teacher-educators prior to “*how* are we teaching” in regards to HHBE and critical multicultural teacher education generally. These insights force us to critically reflect on what Ellsworth (1997) refers to as mode of address, or a consideration of intended audience of curricular and pedagogical interventions. Knowing who teachers are culturally, as well as the ideologies shaping their pedagogy, may help teacher-educators determine the appropriate balance of history, aesthetics, content, and pedagogy given a particular teacher’s and/or school’s wants and needs.

No school hiphoppers like Ms. Oxley who recognized both her students’ connections to hip-hop, along with her own hip-hop illiteracies, just wanted to know what songs to use to accomplish her pragmatic academic objectives. She also wanted to know what the possibilities were of using hip-hop texts in units and lessons that were not specifically “Black.” *Old school hiphoppers* like Ms. Brown who are intrigued by the lyrical wizardry of these “masters of metaphor,” yet deterred by some of the content of contemporary and/or “commercial” hip-hop wanted to know which songs warranted literary and cultural analysis. What could she use for a lesson on extended metaphor or consonance, assonance, and alliteration, etc.? What songs might spark conversation on the types of identity work she pursued? In the classroom, Mr. Candler did not have the

privilege of staying in the backseat; he had to drive the car. Mr. Candler needed the historical and pedagogical knowledge on how to negotiate the relational obstacles that appear unexpectedly when White teachers navigate Black spaces.

Do you Have to be Young, Black, and Male to Effectively Engage in Hip-hop Pedagogy?

It is worth stating the obvious: No White female teachers were nominated for participation in this study. That being said, study findings are salient to discussions of how, if at all, to prepare the vast majority of the teacher workforce to foster more culturally relevant learning experiences for urban youth. In many ways Mr. Candler represents what is possible, and yet what it is probable when White teachers take up HHBE. It is unlikely that White teachers (male or female) who do not self-identify as hipoppers possess the cultural capital to engage in the discursive styles and political substance evidenced by hip-hop pedagogues such as Mr. Westland. Nor should they. That is not to say that White female teachers could not make hip-hop based curricular interventions that build upon the primary experiences of their students while increasing their participation in and identification with school curriculum.

The inherent difficulty is for teacher-educators to engage in a similar process of challenging the assumptions that shape hip-hop pedagogy specifically so that we recognize and consider the broader possibilities of HHBE. Certainly there are problems associated with “outsiders” engaging in any cultural project that is not their own. As is there with the perception that developing, for example, standards-driven hip-hop based curricular resources aligned with the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy that model

contributions, additive, transformative, and social action approaches to “hip-hop literacy education” for White teachers is some how unauthentic or not *real*. One of the few commonalities expressed across all members of the cohort was that the art and science of teaching and learning with hip-hop culture was not part of their formal schoolings on schooling. Yet, the unwillingness of the field, and in particular researchers of HHBE (and hip-hop scholars more broadly), to consider such a fundamental shift stifles the potential of HHBE to interrupt White privilege that circulates throughout White-dominated educational contexts at large. I, for one, refuse to allow our obsessions with keepin’ it real to deny opportunities to provide our children with the “sympathy, knowledge, and truth” (DuBois, 1933) they rightfully deserve. Thanks to Ms. Oxley, I won’t ask the question *why don’t they know?* anymore. The answer is: *Because we haven’t taught them!*

Limitations

Generalizations. Due to the relative small size of the sample population, study findings cannot be generalized beyond members of the cohort. My findings are limited to the White male, Black females, and Black male teachers in this cohort, working in these schools, in this city. However, the sample population is an accurate representation of the teaching workforce in Riverfront, and the findings do paint a more reliable picture of what HHBE might look like in similar cities with similar teacher (and student) populations in comparison to the teacher-researchers who publish HHBE scholarship.

Issues of Institutional Context. Whereas my primary units of analysis were teachers’ practices, behaviors, and identities, this study was also interested in learning about how institutional contexts – schools’ missions, curriculum, teachers, policies, and

protocols – augmented or impeded culturally relevant teaching and learning. Bearing in mind that much of HHBE research was conducted in non-traditional learning environments such as community centers, correctional facilities, and programs for “at-risk” youth, I intended to study teachers’ practices, behaviors, and identities in comprehensive, neighborhood high schools. I eliminated potential participants nominated from culture-based charter schools where cultural relevance was an explicit part of the school’s mission and curriculum. This was done to procure a sample population and context of study representative of the typical urban teacher workforce and learning environment.

Even in Riverfront, I met considerable resistance in my efforts to gain access to teachers in comprehensive, neighborhood high schools. According to the research review committee of a larger urban district near the city of study, all schools deemed “in need of improvement,” and subsequently all the teachers nominated within them, were off limits to external researchers. Sadly, more so for the people in these communities than myself, all of the neighborhood high schools in this district were “in need of improvement.” Despite acknowledging the merits of the study, this director of research and evaluation explained that the district’s “corrective actions” did not allow for “luxuries” like cultural relevant and/or hip-hop pedagogies. Amidst these frustrations I began to question where, if at all, were these luxuries afforded, and how might we extend them to more teachers, students, and communities?

PHS is by no means a “traditional” or comprehensive high school. That said, PHS made compelling arguments for the continued exploration of progressive school reform models’ capacities to meet the academic and socio-cultural needs of Black and Latino/a

students. Having all begun their teaching careers in prescriptive, comprehensive high schools in Riverfront, participants savored the curricular and pedagogical autonomy and administrative support provided by PHS and Principal Ardmore. Teachers were deeply invested in their students and their boss; and took great pride in quelling notions that (a) the children of Riverfront were incorrigible, and (b) enhancing students' academic and socio-cultural outcomes is an either/or proposition. The autonomy and support encouraged teachers to take pedagogical risks that more often than not translated into intellectually rigorous and culturally relevant lessons and assessments (Exhibitions) of learning.

I found that the small school model, and more importantly, small class sizes, were more conducive to forging the teacher-student relationships paramount to the academic successes of Black and Latino/a students. Many of the institutional boundaries between teacher and student were blurred, if not broken all together. As a result, teachers and administrators were able to identify and address academic, behavioral, and/or domestic issues before they festered into something larger and more disruptive.

The PHS model was by no means perfect. Speaking of teachers, as well as students, the non-traditional learning environment was not for everyone. Based on conversations I overheard in staff meetings and professional development seminars, some teachers indebted to the old model and old knowledge had difficulties unlearning what they knew they knew. Students that lacked initiative, discipline, and basic skills often struggled in the less structured environment. The teachers I observed spent a great deal of time schooling students in the PHS model. Because of PHS' distinguishing qualities, it

was equally as difficult for disgruntled students to transfer out of PHS as it was for 9th grade students to transition into PHS.

In comparison to PHS, 4A is a better representation of the typical high school in Riverfront. The most significant difference between 4A, PHS, and the comprehensive schools in the RSD was that students took two courses in their majors. Class sizes usually numbered more than 30 students and materials were scarce and outdated. Student conduct was governed by the standard discipline policies and protocols of the RSD. Although hip-hop dance was official knowledge in 4A, teachers of core content, Ms. Oxley specifically, closely adhered to traditional, literature-based English curriculum. For these reasons, 4A and Ms. Oxley offered additional institutional contexts that greatly benefited the study.

4A's distinguishing qualities as a small, creative and performing arts high school promoted culturally relevant teaching and learning in a number of ways. Both PHS and 4A were "Black spaces"; however, 4A's artistic emphasis made the physical learning environment more aesthetically Black. Despite all of PHS' talk of relevance, the building itself still felt and looked like a school. In contrast, very little of 4A's décor came from a "teacher's store" or could be described as institutional propaganda. Instead, student-created murals, portraits, photographs, and prose depicted the beauty of Black (and Brown) bodies and experiences in ways that made an institutional space feel a bit more like home.

4A's commitment to academic excellence through the arts promoted cross-curricular collaborations among teachers. Students were given opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of core content using traditional written assessments, as well as

artistic expressions. In 4A (and PHS) I found further evidence of how minority students' participation in and engagement with school increases when their cultural perspectives and individual interests are taken into account and validated in assessments of learning.

Much to my disappointment (and this study's advantage), culturally relevant English curriculum and pedagogy was a luxury even in a school with the population and mission of 4A. Remembering my reasons for wanting to study comprehensive high schools in the first place, 4A and Ms. Oxley provided contexts to study the antagonisms that come with making "White spaces" like traditional, literature-based English curriculum more culturally relevant in Black spaces. All in all, I found that these antagonisms had more to do with participants' beliefs about teaching and experiences with hip-hop culture than with their respective institutional contexts.

Recommendations for Research

1. Ethnographic accounts of White pre-service teachers' life histories, beliefs about hip-hop, and the politics of education related to students of color in urban schools could provide valuable contributions to HHBE research. Such studies may help teacher educators to identify and respond to the questions of identity prospective educators (especially White females) wrestle with when considering the instructional and relational challenges of using hip-hop to teach "other people's children", and to impart, model, and advance the professional dispositions essential to maximizing the academic and socio-cultural achievements of urban youth.

2. If the field wishes to move beyond romanticized portraits of how effective HHBE is for “at-risk” urban youth, researchers must explore various place-based and population-related constraints. What might HHBE look like in urban Catholic schools with predominantly students of color and working-class students? What about in suburban public or elite private schools with predominantly White and upper-class teacher and student populations – does HHBE have a future in these places? What about in elementary schools? Is it ever too early for teachers to draw on students’ hip-hop literacies? Understanding where HHBE is being attempted and the possibilities and limitations inherent to particular places and populations is warranted.
3. Current research does not account for the issues teacher educators may face in preparing teachers to use hip-hop in their classrooms. Qualitative studies focused on the technical, and more importantly, the ontological and epistemological issues that arise in hip-hop based teacher education and professional development contexts will help to address questions about what hip-hop pedagogy is, who it is for, and what it can accomplish for hip-hop cultural outsiders.
4. Study findings set the stage for control-experiment studies that substantiate, disprove, or define the effectiveness of specific hip-hop based curricular and/or pedagogical interventions.

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Appendix A: Research Matrix

Research Question	Unit of Analysis	Research Method
1. What are the teaching practices and behaviors of a cohort of hip-hop based educators?	Teachers: -Conceptions of self & other (COS) -Teacher-student relationships (TSR) -Notions of knowledge (NOK)	Observations & interviews
1a. How do teachers activate students' prior knowledge, introduce new material, and engage them in guided and independent practice?	NOK	Observations
1b. How do teachers perceive curriculum, content & assessment?	NOK	Observations
1c. How do teachers manage the classroom and cultivate a safe, productive, and engaging learning environment for all students?	TSR	Observations
1d. What communicative practices do teachers use in their classroom discourses?	NOK; TSR	Observations
1e. How do teachers balance the demands of AYP w/ the socio-cultural needs of students?	COS	Observations
1f. What framing approach do teachers use: inquiry-based, project-based, and/or problem-based?	COS; NOK	Observations & interviews
1g. What is the nature of teachers' relationships with their students, colleagues, administrators, and communities?	TSR	Observations & interviews
1h. How, if at all, are traditional power dynamics reimagined in teachers' classrooms?	COS; TSR	Observations

1i. How do teachers define effective teaching and student achievement?	NOK	Interviews
2. In what ways do these practices and behaviors reflect or not reflect hip-hop pedagogies?	Teachers	Observations
2a. How are hip-hop texts, methodologies, and worldviews employed in the classroom?	NOK	Observations
2b. How are critical literacies used to identify and respond to structures of power and meaning within hip-hop texts?	NOK	Observations
2c. How, if at all, do teachers operate as cultural workers, critical intellectuals, and/or public pedagogues?	COS; TSR	Observations
3. How is the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies impacted by participants' cultural identities?	Teachers	Interviews, observations & textual analyses
3a. How do teachers' racial, cultural, and generational identities impact their effectiveness in engaging in pedagogies <i>with, about</i> and <i>of</i> hip-hop?	COS; TSR; NOK	Interviews, observations & textual analyses
3b. How do teachers' beliefs about teaching impact their willingness and/or ability to meet the academic and socio-cultural needs of students?	COS; TSR; NOK	Interviews, observations & textual analyses

Appendix B: Participant Nomination Form

Identifying Hip-hop Based Educators in the Public Schools

Principal Investigator: Marc Lamont Hill, Ph.D., Temple University, 267-226-7523

Student Investigator: H. Bernard Hall, Temple University, 267-539-7308

Principal's Name: _____

School: _____ **Contact info:** _____

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the ways teachers in the Public Schools incorporate aspects of hip-hop music and culture in their classrooms. In the late 1970s, early 1980s, hip-hop was originally comprised of four “elements”: DJing, breakdancing, MCing and graffiti art. Definitions of hip-hop have since been expanded to include beatboxing, street fashion, street language, street knowledge and street entrepreneurship.

I turn to you for nominations of “culturally relevant” educators that use elements of hip-hop to improve students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. For example, can you recall any teachers who use rap lyrics as poetic and/or historical texts in English class? Exemplar teachers who effectively negotiate the demands of AYP while addressing the socio-cultural needs of urban youth? Can you suggest any teachers who “keep it real,” linking lessons learned in and about school with lessons learned in and about the street? If so, please print the teacher’s first and last name, as well as the subject and grade they teach in the space provided below.

Teacher’s Name(s)	Subject & Grade
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I sincerely thank you for your participation in this study. Rest assured that the information and access provided by you will go a long ways towards improving the educational experiences of urban youth in _____ and beyond.

Respect,

H. Bernard Hall

Appendix C: Potential Participant Questionnaire



Potential Participant Questionnaire

Educational Leadership
 1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
 2nd Floor Ritter Hall 003-00
 Philadelphia, PA 19122

phone 215-204-8061
 fax 215-204-2743

Identifying Hip-hop Based Educators in the Public Schools

Dear teachers,
 This brief questionnaire identifies culturally relevant teachers in the _____ and the extent they incorporate aspects of hip-hop culture in their classrooms. The information gathered here will be used to select teachers to participate in a 5-month qualitative study involving interviews and observations of *who* is using hip-hop based teaching practices and behaviors; *how* and *why*. Insights gained from this inquiry will be used to improve the professional development of current and prospective teachers in the _____ and teacher education programs.

When completing this survey, please circle the response that represents you and your experiences most accurately. Rest assured that any and all of your contact and demographic information will be confidential, so please be as honest as possible. I apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused and thank you for your time, effort, and expertise.

Please print clearly

Name: _____ Phone & email: _____

Subject-area / grade level: _____

School: _____ Principal: _____

For the following options, please circle one:

Do you incorporate elements of hip-hop culture and/or rap music in your classroom?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
--	-------	-----------	------------

Examples or titles of lessons/units, etc: _____

Do you self-identify as a "hiphopper"?

	Yes	No
--	-----	----

Your Race Asian Black Latino/a Multi-racial Native American Other White

Your Sex Female Male

Teaching experience 0-3 4-6 7-12 +12

Would you be willing to participate in this study? Yes No I need more info

For additional information, contact H. Bernard Hall (hbhall@temple.edu or 267-539-7308).

Appendix D: Consent Form

Exploring and Understanding the Teaching Practices and Behaviors of Hip-hop Based Educators in Traditional K-12 Learning Environments

Principal Investigator: Marc Lamont Hill, Ph.D., Temple University, 267-226-7523

Student Investigator: H. Bernard Hall, Temple University, 267-539-7308

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways urban public school teachers incorporate elements of hip-hop music and culture in their classrooms. Your participation in this study is dependent on meeting the following inclusion criteria: (a) full-time employment as middle or high school English/Language Arts teacher in the Public Schools, (b) 3 or more years of teaching experience, and (c) use of hip-hop culture in classrooms and instruction, and/or self-identification as a “hiphopper.” Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Teachers are free to participate, or not, or may leave the study at any time without penalty.

Participants will be interviewed on two separate occasions, once in January 2010 and again in June, and asked to answer questions about their experiences living and/or teaching with hip-hop, in addition to the notions of effective teaching and student achievement guiding their practice. Teachers may refuse to answer any question that is asked. Participants will also be observed in their classrooms and schools once a week, for two hours, over a five-month period from January 2010 through June 2010. Rest assured that all personal information, audio recordings of interview responses, and observation notes will be kept entirely confidential and stored in a locked room off-site, only accessible to me. All personally identifiable information (names of participants and schools) will be disguised through the use of pseudonyms and paraphrasing in the final manuscript and will have no direct impact on any teacher’s experience in their respective school.

The interviews and observations will benefit participants by encouraging teachers to reflect on the triumphs and tensions that emerge as culturally relevant teaching practices and behaviors are used to improve the academic achievement, cultural competence and critical consciousness of urban youth.

Questions and further information regarding your rights as a research subject may be directed to Mr. Richard Throm, Office of the Vice President for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19140, (215) 707-8757.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix E: Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Research Questions	Collection Tools	Analytic Tools	Initial Codes	Findings
#1) What are the teaching practices & behaviors of a cohort of “hip-hop based educators”?	-Participant-observations -Interviews	-A priori coding of fieldnotes and transcripts (CRP) -ATLSti qualitative data software -Analytic memos	-Conceptions of self & other (COS) -Teacher-student relations (TSR) -Notions of knowledge (NOK)	No single set of practices & behaviors *See table below
#2) In what ways do teachers’ practices and behaviors reflect or not reflect Hill’s (2009) “ hip-hop pedagogies ”?	-Participant-observations -Interviews	-A priori coding of fieldnotes and transcripts (HHP) -Analytic memos	-Pedagogies <i>With</i> HH -Pedagogies <i>About</i> HH -Pedagogies <i>Of</i> HH	-Contributions -Additive -Transformative -Social Action (Banks, 2010)
#3) How is the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies impacted by teachers’ cultural identities ?	-Participant-observations -Interviews	-A priori coding of fieldnotes and transcripts (CRP)	-Academic achievements -Cultural competencies -Critical consciousness	-Old School Hiphopper -Out-of-School Hiphopper -No-School Hiphopper -New School Hiphopper
		-Reconstructive Analysis Methodology (Carspecken, 1996; Silva, 2001)	-Discourse as text -Discourse as interactive process -Discourse as social practice	

	COS	TSR	NOK
Ms. Brown	“I see myself as an agent of change”	“My kids” (othermothering)	Hip-hop as text (poetry)
Mr. Candler	“[Ivy League University] & Freire has the largest influence on my decisions & actions as a teacher”	“...it’s not origami... (or is it?)”	Hip-hop as text (political)
Ms. Oxley	“I’m a teacher of English”	Her clients	Hip-hop as “hook”
Mr. Westland	“I’m out here puttin’ in (cultural) work”	“He treats us more like his brothers and sisters than his students” – Leslie, 10 th grade	Hip-hop as methodology

Appendix F: Permission to Audiotape

Exploring and Understanding the Teaching Practices and Behaviors of Hip-hop Based Educators in Traditional K-12 Learning Environments

Principal Investigator: Marc Lamont Hill, Ph.D., Temple University, 917-301-5883

Student Investigator: H. Bernard Hall, Temple University, 267-539-7308

Research Participant: _____ Date: _____

I give H. Bernard Hall permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose:

Research:

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time and place will my name be used.

When will I be audiotaped?

I agree to be audiotaped during interviews and observations for the time period:
_____ to _____.

How long will the tapes be used?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: February 1, 2010 to January 31, 2011. All audiotapes related to this study will be destroyed within 3 years of the completion of this study and no later than January 31, 2013.

What if I change my mind?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my standing with the _____ in any way.

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have any questions and/or concerns I can contact:

Principal Investigator's Name: Marc Lamont Hill, Ph.D

Institution: Temple University

Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies – Urban Education

Address: 1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19124

Phone: 917-301-5883

This form will be placed in my records and the person named above will keep a copy.

*Continued on the next page...

Exploring and Understanding the Teaching Practices and Behaviors of Hip-hop Based Educators in Traditional K-12 Learning Environments

Please check one:

I agree to be audiotaped during interviews and observations.

I do not agree to be audiotaped during interviews and observations.

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix G: Observation Log

	Ms. Brown	Mr. Candler	Ms. Oxley	Mr. Westland
1/25	1 hour	1	2	1
1/27	2	1	1	1
1/29	1	2	1	1
2/1	1		1	2
2/3	2	1	1	1
2/5	2	1	1	1
2/8	1	1	2	1
2/10 Blizzard				
2/12 Blizzard				
2/15	1	1	1	1
2/17	1	2	1	1
2/19	1	1	2	
2/22	2	1	1	1
2/24	2	1	1	1
2/26	2	1	1	1
3/1 Testing	1	1		2
3/3 Testing		1	1	2
3/5	1	1	1	1
3/8	1	2	1	1
3/10	2	1	1	1
3/12	1	1	2	1
3/15	1	1	1	1
3/17	1	1	1	1
3/19	2	1		2
3/22 sick				
3/24	1	1	1	1
3/26	2		2	1
3/29	1	1	1	1
3/31	2	1	1	
4/2-4/11 spring break				
4/12	2	1	1	1
4/14	1	1	1	1
4/16	2		1	1
4/19	1	1	2	
4/21	1	1	1	1
4/23	1	2	1	
4/26	1	1	1	2
4/28	2		1	1
4/30	1	1	1	1
5/3	1	2		1
5/4	1	1	1	1

5/5	2	1	1	1
5/6	1	1	1	2
5/10	1	1	1	1
5/11	1	1	1	1
5/12	2		1	1
5/13	1	1	1	2
5/14	1	1	1	1
5/17	1	2	1	1
5/19	2	1	1	1
5/20	2		1	1
5/21	1	1	1	1
5/24	1	1	1	2
5/25	1	1	1	1
5/27	2		1	1
5/28	1	1	1	1
6/1	1	2		1
6/2	1	1	1	
6/4	1	1	1	1
6/7	1	2	2	
6/9	1	1	1	1
6/11	2	1		1
6/14	1	1	1	1
6/15	1	1	1	2
6/17	1	1	1	1
6/18	2	1	1	1
6/21	1	2		1
6/23	1	1	1	1
6/25	1	1	1	1
6/28	2		2	1
6/29	1	1	1	1
6/30	1	1	1	1

TOTAL: 280 hours